№16

ARKEN SWORD

50p

DREDD

Ron Smith

John Wagner Glenn Fabry

EDITORIAL

Hi,

At last. Another issue finished (though it's only just started for you.)

I've managed to interview a lot of people over the past couple of months. Theas were mainly due to the UK Comic Art Convention '85 & Scotcon '85. I enjoyed both cons, though they both had their faults. UKCAC was in too small a venue but was well-organised, while Scotcon was in a nice location but had nothing going on most of the time. I look forward to this years cons which include one in Birmingham this year.

Ark now has American distribution, but I have yet to receive any letrers from our cousins across the water. An off-shoot of this American venture is that I've reprinted copies of Ark 13 14 (the one with Brian Holland cover interview, plus interviews with Alan Moore, Howard Chaykin and Phil Elliott.) £1.30 by post, and well worth it.

Thank-you to everyone who voted for Ark in the recent Fantasy Advertiser Ballot. Ark got best fanzine and best cover, which quite surprised me. I hope to keep up the standard.

I look forward to hearing from you all,

BEST WISHES,

Paul

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HARLAN ELLISON

The Eclectic's Eclectic

One of the hardest tasks facing anyone who would describe Harlan Ellison to another is the sheer volatility of the man. Author, novelist, short story writer, editor, writer of screenplays and teleplays, columnist, lecturer, liberal dissenter and a person who, at age 12, ran away from home to join the circus. He has received numerous awards, won countless fans, made nearly as countless enemies. He writes stories at parties, in shop windows, on radio talk shows. He is strongwilled, opinionated, arrogant and writes like a demon. Sum him up!

This is, however, what I must now try to do, but be warned that no account of Harlan Ellison's accomplishments does more than scratch the surface of the man, & an investigation of his writings is required. This article will conclude with various recommendations.

Some biographical material to begin with: Ellison was born, in 1935, in Painesville, Ohio, a nastily appropriate name for a town where he was about the only Jewish kid around, and thus subjected to some heavy persecution, physical and mental, from his "peers". He has written often of this period (most of his collections include copious, often autobiographical, introductions) and nothing more horrifying than the pathetically well-meaning attempt of a young girl to save his "condemned" soul from the tortures and damnations that she'd been told awaited Jews.

Many people would have been crushed into neurosis by this unremitting pressure. Ellison didn't escape unscathed, as he will admit, but what he seems to have derived is a steely determination not to be beaten, but to drive forward, to accomplish everything. It created a fanatical arrogance, coupled to a paranoia hatred of rejection and a low threshold for tolerance of stupidity. This is how people make enemies.

The first stories began to appear in the middle 1950s, in SF, crime and men's magazines. Army service and a term as lecturer in a writers college passed by as Ellison struggled to control his material, growing bolder, experimenting further, seeking not only to stretch the boundaries but also to incorporate the beliefs and tenets of a liberal mind, in a not especially liberal era.

Many if not all of Ellison's stories do embody some kind of point, be it moral, warning or threat. It forms part of his central belief that a story is about something, that it has, at its heart, something of what the artist sees, in and of the world, something that he wants to say, about humanity and its condition. Sometimes that desire to speak becomes polemic, with Ellison's concerns too nakedly displayed, but that failing is rare. His experiences and beliefs are always easily discernible, and they are rarely pleasant or hopeful, and often dark and scared, but he produces visions and dreams, and convinces us of the people who inhabit them, so that ultimately ones concern is for the central person. That's the gift of a writer.

It's been seen in his television writing rather less often than Ellison likes. In 1962 he moved from New York to Los Angeles, a move accompanied by dire warnings about the evaporation of talent in the hothouse atmosphere of Tinseltown. Ellison remains strictly resistant to evaporation or dilution.

Nevertheless, his TV experiences, which ceased soon after the fiasco of "The Starlost" in 1973, were cheastening and disheartening. A visual writer,who has always rejected the meddling of others with his work - even as little as asking him to change anything. No-one else gets their hands upon his work. He still gripes about changes made to his "Star Trek" script, "City On The Edge Of Forever"(the one with Joan Collins) that surgically removed all Depression era political realities, whilst the tamperings with "The Starlost", which led to him abandoning the project to his coded pen-name, Cordwainer Bird (as in 'for the birds') form part of an entire book! ("Phoenix Without Ashes" by Ed Bryant and Ellison, published by Savoy Books, Manchester.)

A committed writer and prominent member and supporter of the Writers Guild (especially of its efforts - half-hearted as they were - to up-grade the status and importance of the writer in TV) Ellison was honoured no less than three times with the Guild's award for best teleplay of the year; for his "Soldier" episode in "The Outer Limits" (the script of which appears in the "From the Land of Fear" collection), for the "Star Trek" script and the "Starlost" pilot. In each case the original script, and not the televised version, was under consideration.

Since quitting TV in disgust Ellison's attitude to it has become that of the reformed prostitute, not that he ever had great respect for the mass of TV or the audience that it sucks up to. Two of his best books are the two-part collection of his column of TV criticism from the L.A.Free Press, published as "The Glass Teat" and "The Other Glass Teat". Savoy's edition of "The Glass Teat" can still be found, but with difficulty, but they never managed to get to the British publication of the second volume, which mirrored the books original difficulty in getting published Stateside, despite the extreme popularity of "TGT". It seems that with that first volume Ellison made it onto the infamous White House "Enemies" list - a list of people hated by President Richard Nixon (resigned over electoral misconduct and persistant perversion of justice) and Vice-President Spire T. Agnew (resigned for simpler reasons - tax evasion and graft). All hail the Law and Order boys.

One way or another Ellison has a knack for making his presence felt. As an editor of SF, he made his mark with a single anthology, the legendary "Dangerous Visions" in 1966.

Ellison's premise, which he urged upon everyone he could get his hands on, was stories on themes unacceptable to the magazines, untouchable ideas, beyond pales. The anthology was to not merely stretch but burst all boundaries, be they political, sexual or merely those of taste. That was what it did. From a vantage point of the 1980s it's hard to see how revolutionary the book was (like judging "Sergeant Pepper" now). Good as it is, nothing about Roger Zelazny's "Auto da fe" hints at why a magazine editor might have rejected it (futuristic 'bull-fights' between man and car),though Ted Sturgeon's "If all men were brothers, would you let one marry your sister?"(incest as a cure for cancer, by selective inbreeding) is a little more obvious. Though how any editor at any time could have rejected Samuel Delaney's "Aye and Gomorrah" is inconceivable. For Ellison to have encouraged work of this nature and standard would be enough in a lifetime.

Two slight off-shoots of the Ellison story are his two novels and his film career. Both novels came early in his career, in 1958 and 1961, and neither were SF. "The Deadly Streets"(original title "Rumble") was a teenage gang novel, intended to be very authentic, in counterpoint to Evan Hunter's "The Blackboard Jungle", for which Ellison went 'underground' with a teen gang for three months. "Spider Kiss" (original title "Rockabilly") was a rock'n'roll novel, hailed by critic Greil Marcus as the best ever, though not so highly regarded by others. Ellison has been threatening another two novels for some considerable time: one, "Blood's a Rover" is a prequel to his post Nuclear war novella "A Boy and his Dog" whilst the theme of the other has never been revealed, to prevent the plagiarising of an idea that Ellison regards as a natural.

Similiarly, his film career has been chequered. "A Boy and his Dog" was made into an entertaining film without any direct involvement by the author, whilst during the 80s he worked extensively on the screenplay for an expensive adaptation of Isaac Asimov's "I,Robot" only to see that, after a years labour, the film was killed. His only screenplay to make the screen was for the film of Harold Robbins' book,"The Oscar". Robbins is an author that Ellison despises, and the film is a reputed disaster-area that can make him blush where nothing else can.

Of sometimes equal importance to his fiction is Ellison's columns. Mention has already been made of "The Glass Teat" but more recently, Ellison has had a column in the L.A.Weekly,"An Edge in my Voice" (certain columns of which have been repeated in various Comic Journals during the last two years), covering anything that this iron godfly latches upon, with ire and vigour. A large scale collection is now available but it's difficult to get hold of and damned expensive if you do.

Instinctive Conservatives (political or emotional) will find much room to debate with Harlan Ellison. Instinctive liberals will not always find him an easy bedfellow, because he demands commitment,not attitudinizing, and the barricades are difficult places, even in the 1980's.

All the above may well have proved a frustration &

a trial to the person who just wants to know about Harlan Ellison the SF writer (anyone who says sci-fi gets banned from the rest of this article, not to mention his works.) I submit that the above gives pointers to the nature of the man and his beliefs and, unlike most writers, a knowledge of the Ellison within is a pre-requisite of the understanding of the works. Whether that is a strength or a weakness will be debated later.

What is a Harlan Ellison story about, or like? That is a question to which there is no single answer. Ellison's stories range from purest fantasy to simplest reality, from the outer depths of space to the inner hearts of men and the cities that they build to imprison themselves. The man writes short stories, literally hundreds of them. My incomplete and frankly limited Ellison bookshelf has 9 collections comprising 119 stories. Sum them up!

Certain collections have themes:"Deathbird Stories" is a collection of tales about the new deities we worship, cities, cars, machines, one-arm bandits, cinema characters, and the horrors unleashed by our creation of new gods without the formalising controls of religions;"No Doors, No Windows" collects together stories of horror, non-fantastic tales of ordinary people and what they'll do if you put too much pressure on them. Similiarly,"Love ain't nothing but Sex misspelled" eschews the fantastic for tales examining the sort of crimes performed in the name of what we name as love.

There's a common theme in amongst the story collections quoted above and that's pain, pain and loneliness ("Alone against Tomorrow",split into "The Time of the Eye" and "All the Sounds of Fear" for Britain, is about alienation). Two quotes from Ellison, from certain introductions:'..I knew virtually nothing about love but was totally familiar with hate...' and '..a career lifetime of writing violent and loveless fictions..' Don't go looking for beauty or emotions recalled in tranquility, Ellison is out to turn your stomach over.

Individual stories have hit a peak and become known for themselves, the earliest perhaps among them being "Repent Harlequin, said the Ticktockman" oft quoted as a source for "V for Vendetta", which it does,obliquely, inspire,though Ellison has different things in mind. The Harlequin is a symbol of anarchy in a controlled system where time and punctuality has become the paramount consideration. It's partly polemic and openly political (the Voltaire quote that opens it is part of Ellison's personal creed), and also weird and funny. "Jeffty is Five" appeared in 1980, and promptly won every, and I mean every, award for which it qualified; found in "Shatterday" it's a sad telling tale of the losses brought on by commercialism, of the wholesale robbery of the things we valued as a child, recalled to life by a child who never grew up. "Shattered like a Glass Goblin" is a bizarre anti-drug fantasy,"I have no mouth and I must scream" a shattering tale of hate, hate by machines for man at their mercy (available in "Deathbird Stories" and "All the Sounds of Fear" - where "Harlequin" can also be located), "Croatoan" (from "Strange Wine") is a tale of such disquieting horror that I refuse to tell you anything about it.

As with all things, hyperbole leads to diffused appreciation. Too much raving from me and you'll not want to pick up a copy. Suffice to say that he's original, distinctive, passionate and dangerous. He can be utterly fantastic and dramatically realistic, and all on the same page.

One last debate before I go into a bibliography: like it or not the essence of Ellison suffuses these stories, the air of personality, even as introductions surround and set off each tale. It's a dangerous road to walk for does not the best writing require no more than itself to sustain it, and where a story requires explaining in introductions (or by critics) it fails, by definition. Once Ellison's stories lose the driving force of Ellison himself, will they too dry up and fail for being too personal to him, and thus not so personal to us?

It's arguable. The proof, however, lies with posterity. To my mind, the best of these stories become personal enough to survive the hardest road time will cause them to travel. They will live, because the best cause the best kind of scars: in the memories of those who read them.

However, those recommendations: the collections "Deathbird Stories","Approaching Oblivion","Strange Wine","Shatterday" and "Stalking the Nightmare" see Ellison through the late 60s to the early 80s. Anything before 1970 should be looked at a little askance but "Love ain't nothing..." and "No Doors, No Windows", representing other branches of his fiction deserve attention. Both "Glass Teat" volumes and the "An Edge in my Voice" collections come with highest recommendations. The two "Dangerous Visions" collections, though not strictly Ellison material are well worth finding for the sheer wealth of good writing Ellison manages to extract, and there's the "Partners in Wonder" collection, that drags together fourteen collaborations between Ellison and a wide variety of writers (try "I see a man sitting on a chair and the chair is biting his leg" - sanity demands that I do not reveal the name of collaborator Robert Sheckley).

But you should read Ellison whatever you do. The man is possessed, or driven by something. A tiger, as Alfred Bester would no doubt have put it.●

Martin Crookall

At the UK Comic Art Convention '85.
Above:Frank Plowright(left) introduced all the stars on the first day, including Alan Moore(right). Alan, dapper as always, gave a preview of Watchmen,which was very interesting, & was part of the excellent Swamp Thing panel, which detailed the strange and mysterious events that lead up to each story.
Below:Earth 2 experts Dann and Roy Thomas discussed their future (or should that read 'past') plans for the Earth 2 heroes.

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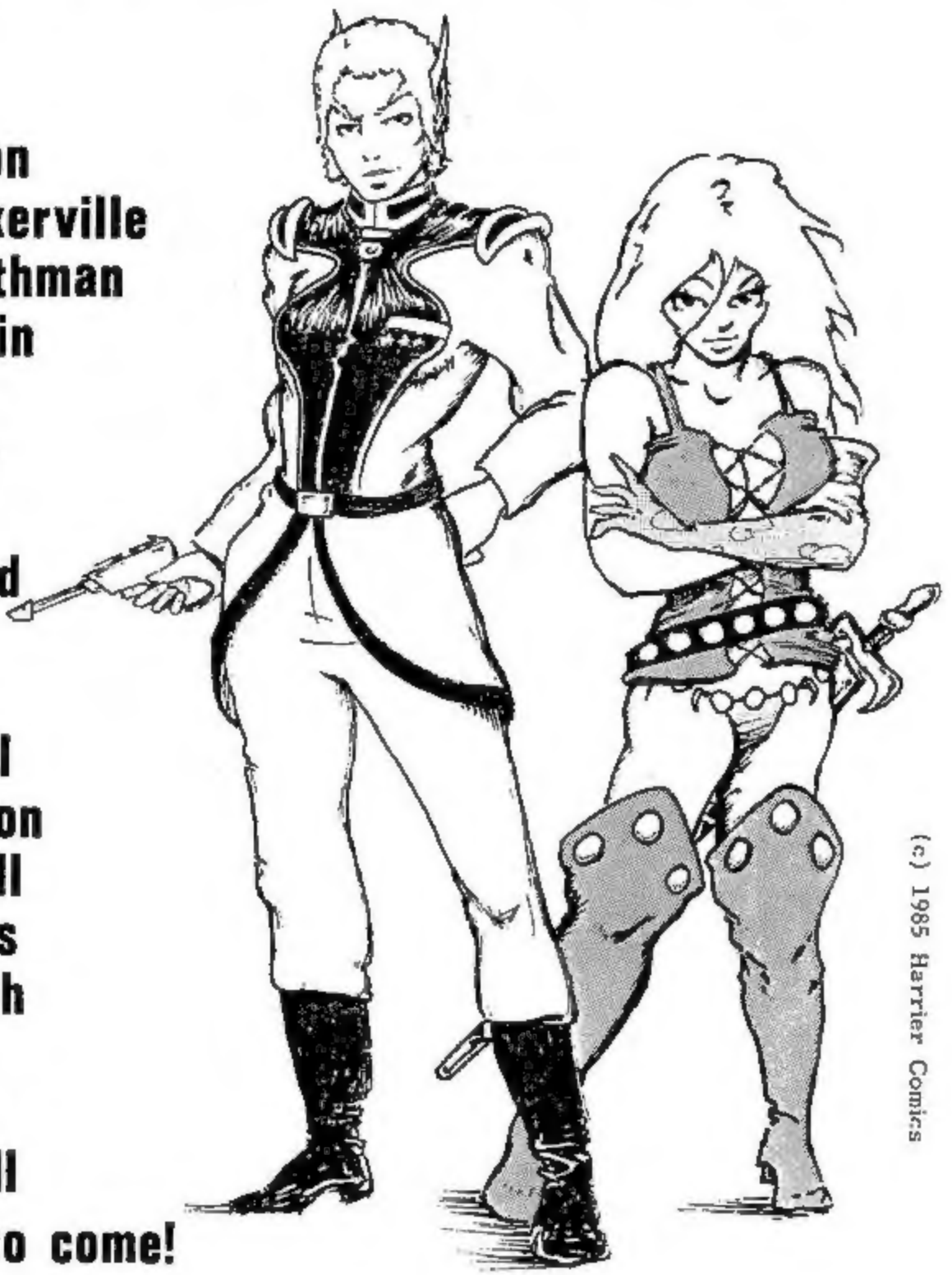

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JOHN WAGNER

Call T.B.Grover 2000ad.

After John had answered questions through the post I bumped into him at Scotcon '85, where he expanded upon his life and work. What sets John's writing apart from others is his biting satire. It may be funny at first glance, but it can be chilling at the next.

My thanks to John Jackson, Chris Byrne and John Smith for their help, and John Wagner for editing the transcript & providing the Cam Kennedy illos,

Paul

John Wagner:I got into comics more by accident than design, when my aunt showed me an advert for "Editorial Assistants" with D.C.Thomson in Dundee. I'd never had any particular desire to be a writer,but I was in a pretty dead-end job and I thought it might be worth a try.

Before going to the first interview most people have enough sense to ask around about Thomsons and find out what they're all about. They're a right wing, violently anti-union set-up who are supposed to treat their workers with a "benevolent" paternalism - though I always found it oppressive. Anyway, successful applicants went to the interview well briefed. They have a questionnaire for the interview full of all sorts of leading questions. "What newspapers do you read?" If you read the Daily Record you were a wee bit dicey. Anything left of that and you were out the door. "I think unions were good once, but they've outlived their usefulness," is the kind of comment you were expected to come out with. If you got past the interview you were sent for a medical. This doctor's surgery was so filthy he told me not to stand on the floor - this is a doctor employed by a huge and supposedly-respectable publishing company. Well that's the kind of respect they showed for their new employees and it never really improved.

I started off in Thomson's Fiction Department,where all the incoming short stories are brought to be weeded out. Fresh in off the streets and you were expected to tell other people how to write. The blind leading the blind. But it hardly mattered as most of the stories were palpably rubbish. Anything with any promise was sent the rounds of all the individual editors. We also handled things like Dixon Hawke, a Sexton Blake-type character, for the Sporting Post - plus romantic serials for other Thomson newspapers.

When I began work with Thomsons I was earning about £10 a week after tax. After deducting money for digs and weekend train fare home I was left with about £1.50 for the whole week, which was a meal on payday. By the time I left Thomsons I was on the grand sum of £16 a week. In order to live I had to take another job. Most other young employees were in the same boat. You worked in a bar or whatever, but if D.C.Thomson found out about it they either told you to stop, or sacked you. A lot of us naturally became very anti-D.C.Thomson so we joined the National Union of Journalists. We had union membership forms sent to every employee whose address we could get hold of, and we recruited something like 17 members. When this came out there was a meeting of the editorial board, with all the Thomsons there. Mr. Derek and Mr. Brian and Mr. Shiteface and all the editors including R.D.Lowe, who was the managing editor of all the comics (Beano,Dandy,Hotspur) Someone said,"What are we going to do about the union?" A minor editor was foolish enough to reply,"Why don't we just let them join it?" R.D.Lowe turned red and bellowed:"Take-that-man's-name!" That's D.C.Thomson. They're a horrible company, and people who stay there long get turned into robots. If you stay for more than 3 or 4 years they reckon you get stuck there forever.

After the Fiction Department I moved onto Romeo,a romantic sister paper to Jackie back in the 60s and 70s, where I handled strip for the first time. Sometimes you'd be given 3 pages of artwork and told that the script had been lost or that it was terrible, write another story to go with the pictures. It can be a tedious job so to liven it up you'd have your characters saying the most absurd things. It showed me how well the absurd works in comic strip, a lesson I've often had cause to be grateful for.

Paul:A large part of editorial work is rewriting other people's stories. What does rewriting teach you?

J:What it teaches you is exactly what you are able to learn. If you haven't got it in you no amount of rewriting is going to turn you into a writer. That said, I suppose the main lesson is self criticism - you can't start changing someone else's script without asking yourself,"Is my alternative any better?" And say it is - is there an even better way of doing it? It's one of the biggest failings of most aspiring scripters - they're not critical enough of their own material. They don't look at their stories and say, well, fine, but how could I make it better?

I never wrote a script while I was at Thomsons. I rewrote a lot of stuff, but I didn't write anything from the beginning until I went freelance.

P:What happened when you left D.C.Thomson?

J:I went freelance with Pat Mills, working in his garden shed. He left Thomsons before me and did the bulk of the work until I joined him. We decided to attack 2 markets: IPC's Girl's comics and IPC's kiddies comics. Pat selected the comic CON! and between us, but mostly Pat, we did a sample script of every strip. If you want to get accepted that's the way you do it. You hit them hard. You send in one script for everything they do. Make them remember you. They bought 12 scripts out of 36, which was pretty good for people who didn't know if they were going to be able to make a living freelance. From this we got put onto regular characters like Jackpot, the gambling kid, and Tomboy. Real mindless stuff most of it, but it was money. We also did girl's comics. We sent in a script about the Irish potato famine, which was one of Pat's hobby horses at the time, and although they did not buy it, it was an introduction to the managing editor of IPC's girls' comics at the time, John Purdie. He came up to see us and got us quite involved doing stories for him. He also got us an introduction to IPC's boys' comics.

One of the first things we did when we left D.C. Thomson was Tallowknife of the Yard, about a red indian transferred to Scotland Yard - real over-the-top stuff - and we sent it to the Thomson comic Hotspur under a false name. We got back the most vicious rejection letter I've ever had. The editor either realised it was us, or he genuinely didn't like it - probably the latter because it showed some imagination. We eventually sold it to IPC, along with another boys' story The Can-Do Kids, which appeared in Lion. That was quite good, actually. It had a lot of the kind of humour that goes into Dredd now.

P:Were the strips you were doing actually things you liked doing, or were they just to live on?

J:Obviously on the kids comics we did an awful lot of stuff we didn't like. We had to do that for the money. But on Lion, Valiant and the girls' comics we came up

with the stories ourselves, so we could write pretty much what we liked, as long as the story was acceptable to IPC.

On the girls' side we dreamed up School for Snobs, which was great fun to write and the top story in Tammy for some time. The Headmistress was an old slob, the head of a school where snobs were sent to be beaten into shape.

Our partnership lasted for about 9 months before Pat and I came to the point of blows. We decided it was time to split up. It happens. It's the same in any partnership. If you've got 2 creative people they are going to argue about things.

I came down to London to IPC, as a freelance, & Pat stayed up in Scotland.

P:It seems to me that you and Pat have done a lot of editing work together.

J:We've been credited with doing a lot more work together than we've actually done. It's always said that we did Action together. I had nothing to do with Action except write Blackjack, the boxing story. I was editing Valiant at the time.

We did create Battle together though - several weeks sitting across from eachother bickering our way through the stories. I thought it was a pretty classy production when it first came out. It's still going now, staggering along, though it's not the comic it was.

P:I loved Battle when it first came out. The strip I really liked was the one about the agent trying to kill Hitler.

J:That was Day of the Eagle, with Mike Nelson as the agent. We had a good artist on that, Pat Wright. He drew very photographically. He was stiff, but his style worked well on Day of the Eagle - gave it a 1945ish quality.

P:The impression I get of the way IPC worked is that a script is sent to the artist, who doesn't know who's written it, and then the artist cranks the stuff out. Was this the way you worked?

J:No, it certainly wasn't. We had a lot of contact with our contributors. If script or art wasn't right it would be sent back, or more often than not, be changed in the office. We were really very particular, about the first issues especially. Everything had to be just right. At that time we spotted Carlos Exquerra in a D.C.Thomson comic and brought him in to do Rat Pack. Massimo Belardinelli first drew for IPC in Battle.

Pat and I were freelance editors on Battle, but there was also an editor working under us to learn what we were trying to do in the paper. That was Dave Hunt, who's now editing Eagle. We also had Steve McManus, now editor of 2000AD. They put up with our bad temper, and I think learned quite a lot about editing in a creative way. Before that, as you suggested, IPC boys' comics had become stale, automatic, with scripts coming in and going out on production line. Nobody seemed to care much about quality. They would never look at a strip objectively and say,"God, that's boring." We always tried to make Battle look exciting and if we got a duff story in it, that people didn't like, out it went.

P:After leaving Battle you went Freelance again. As a writer did you have much contact with the artists?

J:Yes, to some extent, but not as much as I do now.

It wasn't generally accepted that a writer had any need to speak to an artist. It's only latterly with 2000AD that the writers and artists have star started to get together. Certain writers don't bother. I don't bother discussing anything with an artist if I know he's going to draw crap whatever I say. Thankfully I don't work with many artists like that. After initial discussions, some artists actually prefer minimal contact with the writer. They don't like being weighed down by the writer's perception of the story. They want to be able to express their own ideas too.

P:Judge Dredd's origin was really a collaboration of ideas from many people.

J:Yes. A lot of people made valuable contributions. There are dangers too, though, mainly of continuity - which is why it's been good for Dredd that one writer has been involved most of the way through.

I think the idea of Dredd probably came from an idea I had done in Valiant, One-Eyed Jack, which had some roots in the Dirty Harry movies. When Pat was putting together 2000AD I realised from the success of One-Eyed Jack that this was the kind of story the new paper should have - a really hard, tough cop. What was the variation? Obviously he would have to be harder, tougher, and now people down without compunction. Pat had an occult character called Judge Dredd, which was also the name of a reggae group. "Judge" fitted nicely with the hero's role - judge, jury and executioner. I did the first script for it, Pat rewrote it and gave it to Carlos to draw - though the first script to appear in the comic was another one entirely.

The idea in microcosm was summed up by a scene in that first script where Dredd's riding along the road towards the scene of a disturbance and there's a citizen in the road yelling,"Here comes Judge Dredd! He'll sort it all!" The guy is jaywalking so Dredd runs him over with his bike. The guy's lying there bleeding all over the street, and Dredd says,"Jaywalking's a serious offence, citizen. Tell you what - I'll be merciful. I'll give you 10 seconds to make the kerb." The poor citizen crawls for it,but too late. Dredd shoots him and goes along to deal with the next situation. That's the essence of Dredd. Okay, he's been toned down, and quite rightly, but Dredd's still there - that nasty, rotten bastard you love to hate.

Dredd can be an enjoyable character to write. You spend a lot of time wondering how he can spoil Xmas this year, or how he can make someone's life miserable - or how a decent, ordinary citizen,like Chopper for instance, can actually get the better of the big bad bogey man.

I've often been asked if I think it's right to put forward a character like Judge Dredd as a hero. I think people get the impression that they are smart enough to see through Dredd, but most of the readers won't. I don't believe that's true. I've never spoken to a reader who didn't realise that Dredd is not a thorough-going good guy. Quite often Alan and I set out with that intention - to make him look so bad that no-one could like him, to hammer home the point that this isn't a nice future, a future to aim for. That page we did for the UKCAC'85 con booklet was a good example.

P:There's a danger that once you start toning down Dredd the critics' arguments become correct.

J:I think so. If it's always so subtle that the kids begin to believe he's a good guy, then it's wrong. They have to know he's not Mr. Clean, but still enjoy the story on another level.

Below:A page from the UKCAC'85 booklet.

GENTLEMEN THERE ARE LOADS MORE ABOUT THE WAY WE'RE RUNNING THINGS THE PEOPLE, WE HEAR ARE UNHAPPY. THE PEOPLE, WE HEAR ARE SUFFERING.
SO WHAT'S NEW?
THE PEOPLE SAY YOU LIED ABOUT CUTTING TAXES.
WHAT IF WE DID? NO LAW AGAINST LYING
BUT YOU'RE INCREASING WELFARE PAYMENTS, TOO
DAMN RIGHT! WHY SHOULD WE PAY FOR LAYABOUTS AND SCROUNGERS? LET'S MAKE THE CREEPS GET ON THEIR BIKES AND LOOK FOR WORK!
BUT...BUT - THERE IS NO WORK
HUMBUG! THE TROUBLE IS PEOPLE DON'T WANT TO WORK. IF THAT'S THE WAY THEY FEEL, THEY CAN JUST BUTT OUT. WE DON'T NEED THEIR TYPE HERE!
THE SAME GOES FOR THE OTHER WHINERS - THE OLD, THE WEAK, THE SICK. IF THEY DON'T LIKE THE WAY WE DO THINGS, THEY CAN JUST BUTT OUT AS WELL!
THERE'LL BE OPEN REBELLION!
THEN WE'LL STAMP ON IT - HARD! OUR PRISONS MAY BE OVERCROWDED, BUT I DARESAY WE CAN ALWAYS SQUEEZE IN A FEW MILLION MORE!
WHICH REMINDS ME TO MY IDEA FOR OUR NEW POLICE UNIFORM!
OH BWANA!
INCREDIBLY BUTCH, P.M.!
THE FUTURE IS CLOSER THAN YOU THINK!

WAGNER/GRANT/SMITH/PEARCE

Above:Shock, as drawn by Cam Kennedy for the upcoming DC book provisionally titled The Untouchables.

P:You now write in conjunction with Alan Grant. You use many pseudonyms like John Howard, T.S.Grover, Grant Grover, and P.Martin Candor. Why do you hide behind these names?
J:I like to remain anonymous. In fact, John Wagner is probably a pseudonym. Seriously though, it's all a bit of fun. I mean, it was a lot more enjoyable thinking up P.Martin Candor than it was thinking up the Hellstrekkers.
P:If you look at 2000AD, and take out all the pseudonyms, it seems that you, Alan Grant and Pat Mills write everything. It's intimidating for new writers, because it's like a closed shop.
J:It isn't. The trouble is that there are only 2 editorial staff on 2000AD, and they haven't got much time at all, so scripts that come in tend to get stuck in the bottom drawer. Even when I was editing at IPC I had scripts in my bottom drawer for 2 or 3 months, waiting until I had time to deal with them.
At D.C.Thomson, Romeo had 6 editorial staff, so the editor could spend most of his time dealing with new scripts, new writers and artists, and generally overseeing the quality of the material that was going into the magazine. He had time to take someone's script and go into it in depth. If it showed any promise at all he would show the writer how it could be improved. Whereas at IPC, with fewer staff, there's no time for that. A lot of budding writers must be very put off by the treatment they get, understandably. The lesson to be learned is that, if 2000AD staff have so little time to devote to new writers, then a writer has got to work that much harder to make sure his material impresses itself on them at first glance.

P:You and Alan write quite a few stories for Eagle too. The Fists of Danny Fyke wasn't a bad story, and it had the beautiful art of John Burns.
J:He did very well on that. It took a while to get used to him, because he was different, but when you did, the artwork really worked. We also do The 13th Floor, Computer Warrior & Doomlord.
P:Doomlord is the most popular thing in it now.
J:No. It used to be,but recently Computer Warrior has taken over.
P:You originally did the early episodes of Dan Dare.
J:Originally Pat and I did a synopsis for the Dan Dare film, which was never made, so when IPC decided to bring out Eagle again we sent that in to them and explained that we would convert it into a comic strip but only on the basis of first British serial rights i.e. the copyright is retained by us. They bought it.
P:Will it ever be reprinted?
J:I doubt it. It's Catch 22. They own the rights to the character so we can't reprint it, and we own the rights to the script - so they won't reprint it.
P:What about your rights to other strips?
J:I have no rights to anything, except to one story Alan and I did for Look Alive, Genghis Grimtoad, drawn by Angus McBride. We're trying to sell that to Europe at the moment. Nick Landau of Titan Books is interested in publishing it, and a Belgian firm, but we need a few more parties to share the costs before we can go ahead.
That's the only thing I've done for IPC where I've retained copyright. I've no rights to Dredd as far as I know.
P:So this means that you don't get a penny for all the reprints by Eagle Comics or IPC?
J:No.
P:Do you get anything for goodwill?
J:We get a 1% royalty for the Titan Albums, which isn't much.
P:Have you ever thought of writing the present Dredd stories in a way that would make a complete story for an Eagle Comic or Titan Album?
J:We've thought about it, but we can't really, because we'd be cheating the weekly readers. Episodic compilations leave a lot to be desired, but they can be improved. All that's needed is a bit of common sense when they're putting them together. A page cut out here or there, a little judicious tampering with dialogue.
John Smith:To get more in the way of money and rights, now that Dredd is a success, you and Alan could give IPC an ultimatum saying you're not going to write Judge Dredd.
J:I'm not in the position to do that at the moment. When I am, I will certainly apply some pressure. I'm not keen on writing Dredd for ever and ever in any case. But knowing IPC's past form they'd rather say goodbye than give way on royalties. That said, we've recently been given a decent royalty deal on the Daily Star strip, which went daily from December 30. Surprised? You could have knocked me over with a wet haddock.
John Jackson:What extra problems do you face when writing very short Judge Dredd strips for the Daily Star?
J:The big problem is that you can't actually do anything with the strip. Six pictures and wham - it's over. So what it comes down to is a bit of city life and a snappy punchline. It hardly gives a full picture of Dredd, but it's about the best that can be done within the limitations.
P:The artists on 2000AD are getting their pages back now. Do you get anything?

J:Yes. They send us back our words. No, we don't get anything back, but what a lot of artists are doing is to give us some of what they make from selling their pages. Mike McMahon is the only one who's actually turned up with anything so far, bless his heart.

P:Unfortunately Mike is ill at the moment but as soon as he gets better he'll be drawing The Last American for Epic Comics, which you finished writing 3 years ago.

J:Mike knew Archie Goodwin at Epic. He asked Alan and me if we'd like to do a story with him, and we said yes. It's about a man - a soldier - placed in suspended animation for 20 years to sit out the worst effects of the nuclear holocaust raging overhead. His mission, when he emerges, is to pick up the pieces of what is left of America. If indeed there is anything left. It's the way we would write if we had more pages to deal with Dredd. A more serious, in-depth treatment. We were all pretty pleased with it before Mike's illness stopped the project. On its first anniversary I re-read the script and I was still pretty happy with it, which is usually a good sign.

John Jackson:Do you read much SF & comics, and if so which do you count among your favourites?

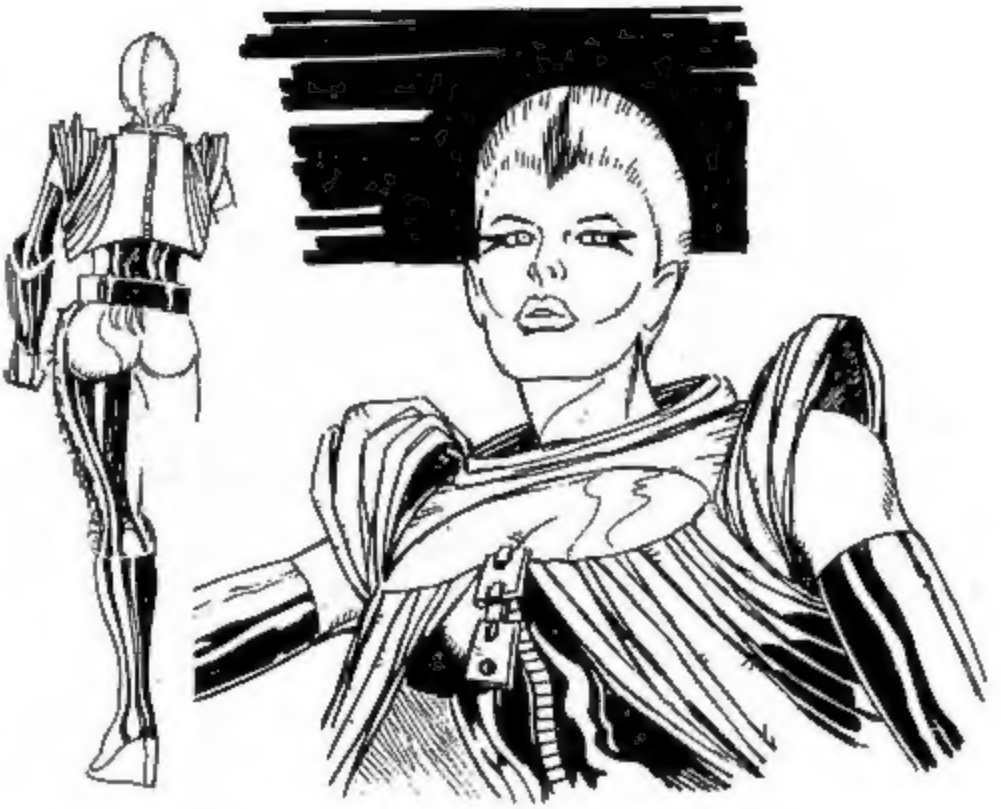
J:I'm ashamed to say I read very little these days. Mostly I work. I've never been an avid comic reader and I tend to leave that side of things to Alan now - one of the advantages of a partnership. Not that I think there's anything wrong with the medium, it's just that so much of what is produced is crap, more's the pity. The same applies to SF in general. Too much of it is third rate, much of that is the publisher's fault. How often have you bought a book by a well-known author just to find it's recycled 50s material? Which wasn't very good when it came out. Books I have enjoyed...? Dune, very much. Most of Philip K. Dick's books up to about ¾ of the way through,when he seems to go a bit haywire. Nothing else comes readily to mind. But what do I know? A whole gang of geniuses may have sprung into print since I last paid any attention. I've read maybe 5 SF books in the past couple of years and I don't remember one of them. Or maybe I've read hundreds and my memory's even worse than I think.

JJ:When you first created Robo-Hunter did you know that funny, satirical robots would be its main attraction?

J:To the best of my recollection, yes, though I think there was also a fairly heavy emphasis on Sam's dynamic qualities. This was important because, when later stories concentrated more on humour (the Goddroid Saga, for instance) Robo-Hunter's popularity dropped.

P:You created Strontium Dog for Starlord, to be drawn by Carlos Ezquerra. Did you see the strip as merely another hero in the Dirty Harry mold, or did you have other plans for the strip?

J:I saw Johnny Alpha as a tortured, tormented character, a victim as opposed to Dredd's tyrant. Quite a different case altogether. Plans? I was happy enough just to get the first script done. Stories often have a way of developing themselves.



Above:Kaine. Over the Page: B.D.Rickenbacker.

JJ:Why did Starlord fail when it had extensive advertising on TV, full-colour printing, and excellent strips like Mind Wars, Ro-Busters and Strontium Dog?

J:It failed because not enough thought was given to the quality of the contents and the price. There was too much dross in Star-Lord. IPC should have gone all the way - higher price, better material. Instead they funked it and got what they deserved, a slightly more expensive, rather insipid version of 2000AD.

P:You relinquished control of Strontium Dog to Alan Grant a little time after the strip had transferred to 2000AD. Was this because you had run out of ideas for it, and perhaps found him too similiar to Dredd?

J:Yes, I suppose that had a lot to do with it. I was pretty fed up with it at the time.

P:You said that you may have a project with Carlos Ezquerra for Epic Comics.

J:Archie Goodwin likes Carlos' artwork and he said he'd like us to do something with him, but we haven't yet had time to get round to it. Archie's brief was a British superhero, who wasn't necessarily so super. A bit in the same way that Marv Wolfman's done the Vigilante I suppose, where he doesn't actually have any real powers.

P:I think Carlos is a Funny choice for America.

J:Because his style is too European?

P:Yes

J:The Americans used to think that but recently there have been a few of them like Archie and Marv who seem quite keen on Carlos. I think they're adjusting.

P:Nick Landau, who brings out the Titan Albums, doesn't like Carlos' stuff.

J:No. He keeps on delaying the Strontium Dog Albums.

P:What are the pros and cons of writing with someone else?

J:When you work on your own you tend to get very deeply involved, very wrapped up in what you're doing. Stories on the whole are more eccentric, individual. With two people you have to make a lot of compromises. Rough edges get knocked off, which is not always a good thing. On the other hand, in a partnership you've got two brains working on any idea, which has obvious advantages. Plus you've got an instant critic sitting opposite you.

P:You're writing stuff for America with Alan. Do you see yourself writing some stuff on your own?

J:I think circumstances will arrange that. At the moment we enjoy working together most of the time, though we both still work on our own as well.

P:So you see writing as work now?

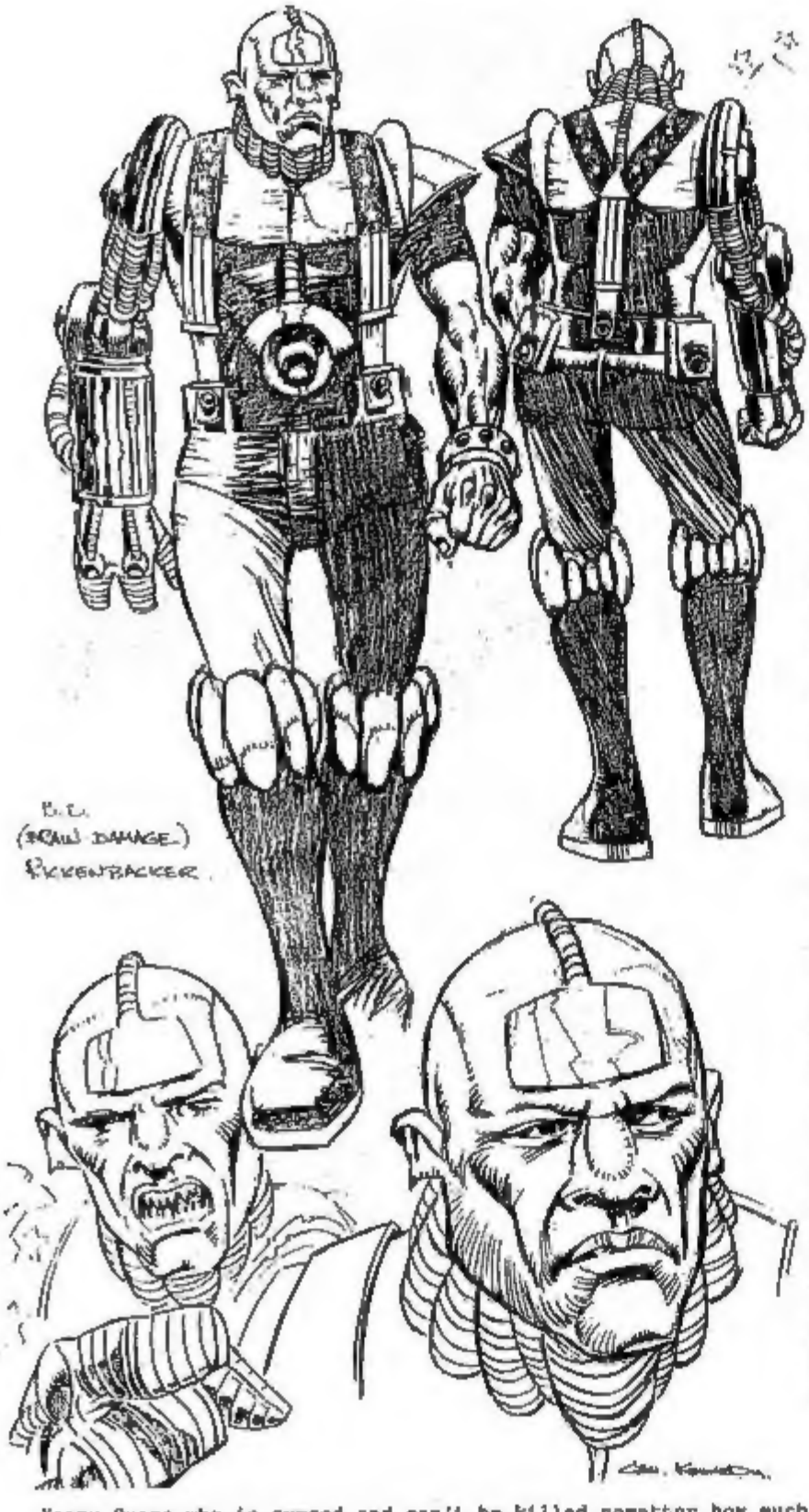
J:I used to enjoy it a lot more than I do now.

The position we're trying to reach is to do less work and spend more time on it, really get deeply involved with it. Hopefully, once the American stuff starts coming through, we will. Whenever royalties are involved, we make sure we put a lot of work into the project. Like, for instance, the one we did for DC, The Untouchables(though this title will have to be changed), which, in all, took us 3 months to get right.

P:That's to be drawn by Cam Kennedy.

J:Yes. We didn't want to hit them with something totally oddball, so we thought,"They like superheroes and team stories, so let's write a team story that's just a little offbeat." It involves 4 characters, whose leader is a female mutant, though not overtly so. They are fighting against an evil, corrupt regime. In a way it's the opposite side of the coin to Dredd. We've done the oppressor, now let's see what it's like for the oppressed.

We've got some good characters in it like B.D.Rickenbacher - the B.D. stands for Brain Damage - and



J:It's depressing. Death would appear to be imminent. IPC is contracting on all fronts, Marvel UK are a reprint company, D.C.Thomson - well, say no more. What we need is a new company on the scene with a bit of money and a few new ideas. Who it will be I don't know, but someone's bound to come along sooner or later. Probably later.

P:Do you see comics split into two groups? one a serious medium where statements can be made, and the other mindless entertainment for children? Or do you take it all with a pinch of salt?

J:It's a good idea to take just about everything you read with a pinch of salt. I don't see why comics can't be both a serious medium and entertainment. There's no need for comics, on any level, to be mindless, though they all too often are.

P:What sort of reaction have you had from the Americans concerning Judge Dredd?

J:When Judge Dredd first came out as an Eagle comic Nick sent us a whole bunch of letters which were very, very favourable, but he's never printed any of them. I think the Americans find the direct approach refreshing. They like someone who just goes in there and shoots them up. They're fed up with all the breast-beating and soul-searching. You can't make a blanket comment about it, because some of it is done quite well, but most of it is just put in to fill space. They don't know what to do with the story or how to plot it properly, so out comes the trowel and on goes the agony. It generally comes across as phoney and boring.

P:But I think good stories based on characterisation can be done.

J:Well, Will Eisner has been proving that for years, hasn't he?

P:Do you see yourself writing those sort of stories, because you're associated with action stories?

J:I think that when you see the American stories you'll see they have a lot more depth. There is no fighting, for instance, in the first episode of The Last American apart from a brief flashback to his army days. That's not to say it's overloaded with anguish. It's there, but the story's not weighed down by it.

P:Do you think this is opening new avenues, allowing you to use more skills as a writer?

J:I think the more I do it, the more I'll see the openings, the opportunities. At the moment things are very tight because these are our first efforts for America so they have to be just right. We can't afford to explore for a bit. Let's get in there first, and then push the boundaries of the thing. The reason they want us is because of Dredd, so they'll be looking for something fairly direct and punchy. We're trying to hit the middle course: direct, punchy, but not superficial. You will see, in about 10 years, when it all comes out. ■

Yancy Quong who is cursed and can't be killed nomatter how much he wants to die. In fact, the only one with the power to kill him is the woman Kaine.

We wrote it over a year ago and sent it in to DC. We eventually got a call from Dick Giordano. "Jenette likes it, Paul Levitz likes it, and I like it." After that, nothing. No response to phone calls, no response to letters. We must have phoned America over 50 times. An editor was appointed to it. No one at DC told us he had been appointed. We heard through Pat Mills and Kevin O'Neill that we'd got an editor. By this time I'd told Alan,"I'm not doing anymore phoning. Fuck 'em. If you want to phone them, phone them." So he took over. And continued to get little response.

Anyway, to cut the story short, things seem to be moving at last. We've got a new editor, Julie Schwartz, who seems to be on the ball.

P:Has Cam done character sketches and the like?

J:Yes, he's done some good sketches. He's going to do 2 or 3 pages of continuity for Julie next, then hopefully the story will be go.

P:What do you think of the present state of the comics industry in Britain?

CAMELOT 3000

The return of King Arthur in a twentieth century comic and its relation to Malory.

by Martin Drury

Thomas Malory's Arthuriad would, if it were not for the neat tidying-up of the Lancelot-Guinevere relationship in The Dolorous & Departing Out of This World of Sir Lancelot and Queen Guenevere chapter, come to a close in The Day of Destiny part of 'The Most Pitteous Tale of the Morte Arthur Saunz Guerdon' with the cagey statement that the king "here in thys worlde he chaunged hym lyff" and with the non-committal piece of reporting that"many men say that there ys written upon the tumbe thys HIC IACET ARTHURUS, REX QUONDAM REXQUE FUTURUS " The writer of the definitive English Arthurian tragedy (for indeed the general structure follows the classical patterning of Medieval tragedy, complete with the idea of fortune s wheel) is clearly ambiguous as to whether King Arthur died or not, and understandably so, for no one after 1191, the date of the discovery of a tomb at Glastonbury which could have been Arthur's, could give credibility to the 'once and Future king' myth, although that did not deter Lawman from having a brave attempt in Brut in the early thirteenth century

Malory's fence-sitting though did not prevent Mike Barr, a 20th century comic writer, from taking the notion that Arthur will return and weaving a whole storyline around it. How well this sequel to Malory handles the characters and themes of the Arthurian legend will now be examined.

Taking characterisation first; King Arthur in Camelot 3000 really has 3 roles: hero, monarch,& man As hero, Arthur heralds the coming of a new day to vanquish the powers of night, his first words are "How long--how many nights has slept Arthur Pendragon King of Britain, Lord of the Roman Empire?" He is to bring hope, to provide a dream for an inspiration-deprived population. As in Malory, he becomes the defender of the innocent, saving the woman and child, and also acts, under the guidance of Merlin, as a kind of uniting force for the oppressed His is a heroism based on nobility of conduct and martial prowess. He is only whole once he has reclaimed Excalibur and in battle is not content to hold his own ("he either dies--or he triumphs"). Arthur, as monarch, is shown as King of England (note his tender longing for his country); the king of the people (picking up the child before his wedding); & as king to his knights He is an enforcer of law, as we see in his decision to execute Kay. This seems harsh, but it is in character for him to be so decisive, for, in Malory, Arthur, when he found out

about his incest with Morgause consigned all the babies born in May to a watery grave, and tried to burn Guinevere at the stake when her adultery became public knowledge. Arthur, as liege, is concerned for his knights, and even performs belittling tasks like back scratching for them. When the round table is jeopardized, he is determined and dominant, overcoming his own grief at Guinevere's lack of faith, to expose the Judas Knight by imperiously ordering Kay, his brother, to take the sword and to prove his disloyalty. This example points to the aspect of kingship most commonly focussed on--the problematic nature of responsibility. It is something Malory dwells on too. "Alas, wayde I there yet had I never leste one moethe syne I was Kynge crowned of this londe." Arthur comes to terms with the situation though, and his decision to look to the future as the past is unalterable is probably his best option. Arthur's resolution is made concerning the Lancelot-Guinevere affair, the feature of Camelot 3000 that most brings Arthur's humanity to the fore, although there are other instances of it. The concern for Tom as the latter leaves to search for the Holy Grail is affectionate and fatherly. Kay is addressed in the term of endearment "Kex", although Arthur does eschew "childish nicknames", when he wishes to speak as a man, and, more specifically, as a monarch with his knights' interests at heart. His old fashioned manner of speech and reactions to his surroundings reveal that he is not really at home in the year 3000. Indeed he admits he is out of his league, as he favours "combat from the back of a horse" rather than a plunge through space. However, he is no fool and manages to link the Government with attacks on New Camelot, wishes to attack the root cause of the Neo-Men rather than the Neo-Men themselves, and recognises the improvements in medicine & armouring as beneficial. Resourcefulness is another of his attributes as revealed by his use of Excalibur as more than a weapon. For all his intelligence though, he is clearly mystified by Guinevere's resurrection from the dead, and not immune from impetuosity as shown by his headstrong charge into a circle of Neo-Men.

Our first encounter with Merlin emphasizes his Satanic background, an aspect straight out of Malory. This plays a crucial role in the final issue, when Modred, wearing the Grail, is hurled against Merlin. Thus, two opposites, God and the Devil, are brought into contact, producing a reaction which frees Merlin and blasts Modred. In the last issue, Merlin not only takes care of Modred, but also Nyneve and Morgan (temporarily), before transporting the remaining knights to Earth. He is a (if not the) key figure in the Morte section, and it is hardly surprising that Mike Barr felt the need to remove such a useful 'resolving agent' from the storyline in issue 8 for a time, even if the method of doing so, Nyneve, the only person Merlin loves, is not to be found in Malory as a seductive witch, as she is in C3000, but a Damsel of the Lake, fearful of losing her virginity to the Devil's son. Nyneve dispenses of Merlin's threat for Morgan, and yet the antagonism between the two magic-users is also not Malory-based, although much is made of it in C3000, with direct confrontations in issues 2 & 5 (by flashback) and the whole of their actions reading as a sort of cosmic game of chess, in which Merlin, the more cunning player, triumphs by using his enemies' strengths against them. It is not only in issue 12 that Merlin shows his might though; a lot of the events that take place appear orchestrated by Merlin. He calls Tom Arthur's "pet", but Mr. Frantics is his own too in a sense, as he arranged Tom's discovery of the tomb. He made sure Arthur's wound from the battle of Salisbury Plain was cured and that the world knew of Arthur Pendragon. He is conscious of a plan and does not want Arthur performing for [illegible] Indeed he actively discourages Mor has he [illegible] to hostile action of course as shown by his changing [illegible] phone into a snake. Arthur in a way is Merlin's pawn as the latter does not reveal the extent of the energy he sees within the sword to him and tests his competence as a piece in his power-play. For all his knowledge and power though, he is in a sense limited and merely working to the best of his ability within set boundaries. It is fate not Merlin that decrees Arthur only has 8 knights, and he seems in pain when he refuses to help Tristran & Percival, almost as if he would like to help but is constrained from doing so. Destiny is a strong force in Malory too, in that it is a trick of fate that Arthur fails, and so it is consistent of Barr to include it in his sequel. Merlin's exact place in all this fore-ordained manoeuvring is hard to discern though, as he wishes Arthur to marry Guinevere, something he was opposed to in Malory, despite the strong possibility of adultery re-occurring, and yet he does not really accept Lancelot and Guinevere's illicit relationship as the way of all things. He is hostile to Lancelot dismissing him as a "Fool" and making the pointed comment, "Wise words for a change" in the final issue. Guinevere also, is being sent to a penal colony in Australia, feels a hint of his former dislike of her. Indeed, although Merlin says he knows nothing of the human heart, and he seems to show this in his off-hand attitude to Lancelot, who does at least try to suppress his passion for Guinevere, looked at from the other side, he does seem to betray a tenderness for Arthur, which leads to him condemning Lancelot & Guinevere rather than merely accepting disinterestedly their part in fate's game. His position is hard to pin down though, and our lasting impression of Merlin, as in Malory, is of a man of mystery, who enigmatically turns up from time to time, and then either disappears or recedes into the background.

As Jules Futrelle, Lancelot provides succour to distressed refugees before his enlistment and after his banishment. He is handsome and charming--a far cry from the brutality he showed as epic hero in the Lucius section of Malory, and an adaption of the Lancelot of his own book, who is chiefly desirable because of his prestige and worthiness. He is also the richest man in the world, and this enables him to donate his orbiting asteroid retreat, Futrelle's Fortress, to Arthur's cause and make it New Camelot. Indeed, as suggested in issue 9's letter column, it seems Barr's policy that his future versions of the stock Arthurian figures will have inherent advantages from their new identities. Certainly it is the case with Lancelot's wealth and Guinevere's position as commander of Earth's defences. As such, Guinevere is said to be "indispensable". She is neither a clinging woman or a damsel in distress but a woman of action. She speaks bluntly and is shrewd in the way she talks Tristran into being the attendant at her wedding. Guinevere in Malory is rather different. We see in The Tale of Lancelot and Guinevere that she has power, but that she fails to wield it to any real effect because of her jealousy, selfishness and anger.

Hurrying over predictable characteristics such as bravery ("Let's show them what Round Table knights are made of") and quick-wittedness (using the talisman to destroy Owen when she discovers only Morgan le Fay's magic can defeat him), Sir Tristran really is characterised by the trick of fate that makes him reincarnated as the woman Amber March. Much is made of this and one would assume that regular play on the fact would become tiresome, but this is far from the truth. Tristran is one of C3000's most interesting characters and her success is due in no small part to the fact that she dramatises what is a topical issue today in this age of sex changes, 'gender benders' et al. (For ease of use of pronouns, Tristran, despite the fact that the character was male in Malory and acts like a man for the majority of C3000, will generally be referred to as a woman except in any parts specifically concerned with Malory's Tristran, because the approach of this essay is to begin with C3000--and hence Barr's version of the characters--and from there to glance back towards Malory. Tristran in the aftermath section of issue 13 is definitely female, both in appearance and behaviour (as shown by the wearing of the dress and the kiss for Tom) and this final stage of characterisation is the starting point from which the examination of personality proceeds.) The other source of interest in the treatment of Tristran is that in her past life in Malory, she was a thrusting dynamic sort of male. Barr, however, with a touch of poetic licence makes the Tristran of old even more aggressively masculine by having him rape a peasant, a detail not present in Malory, and this makes Tristran's current identity as a woman presumably the source of guilt feelings and definitely the source of vulnerability to the male carnal impulse (she is mauled and sexually threatened by a reconstituted Owen McAlister). However, although Barr adapts Malory, his basic approach is the same, namely to erect barriers to the course of true love (In the first life, Isolde was betrothed to another; in the second, Tristran is encased in a female body.) In C3000, this obstacle is not borne patiently. Tristran rejects her female form, and asserts her maleness with a short haircut, an insistance on being called "Sir" and finally a suicide attempt in a desperate bid to be rid of womanhood once and for all. She feels trapped in the wrong body ("This prison of flesh"), and there is a statement of her dilemma ("I a not a woman. I'm a man...I just have the body of a woman"). Tristran resolves to betray the Round Table to regain her manhood and hence to be able to love Isolde as she deserves, but actually all she is guilty of in the end is the intention, because Kay

plays the role of Judas Knight before her. She remains loyal to Arthur and even acts the part of seductress for him, something loathesome to her. Just as her disgust at her female form causes Tristran to contemplate treachery, so it makes her snappish to Guinevere at times. This is really the closest we come to the lack of respect exhibited towards the Queen in Malory though. In the final issue of C3000, we see that Tristran is not averse to Tom and the two almost kiss. The moment is lost though and Tristran decides to spend her life with Isolde although she does not know how to cope with the fact that they are both women. The recreation of the rose garden at Lancelot's castle clinches Isolde's argument for them having a sexual relationship though, and they begin a lesbian affair. Thus it is actually the presence of the beloved and sharing one's life with her, not the privilege of fighting for her, that is important in the year 3000, a time when the idea of knight errantry is inapplicable, not vice-versa as in Malory. The moral to be drawn from Tristran's reincarnation is that true love transcends physical limitations. It was Isolde who realised this first and she is generally portrayed as a level headed woman. She is not only beautiful but good at her job, forceful when provoked, and discriminating in her judgement (she realises the propaganda goes against the United Nations former policy regarding King Arthur). She certainly seems a better partner for Tristran than Owen McAllister, who is portrayed in a steadily worsening light, even if his deterioration is wholly, or at least partially, attributable to Morgan. Indeed he almost takes on a King Mark role in the comic. Just as Tristran's uncle failed to prove himself a worthy knight in Malory, Owen has little code of honour (he shoots Guinevere in the back , and, like Malory's Mark, is violent to Round Table knights in general, and Tristran specifically.

If Tristran is well-done as a character, it must be said, as in the letter column to issue 8, that Galahad is poorly developed. In Malory, Galahad was the perfect Christian knight, and one cannot help wondering why, when he is reincarnated as a failed Roman, he does not feel any qualms at all about trying to kill himself, despite the dictates of the bushido code. Arguing that the suicide attempt shows the high demands he places on himself in his life, just as he did in his former, is not wholly convincing, nor is the substitution of honour for holiness. He does not wish to see the Grail again, as it transfigured him before, and yet surely the possibility of unity with God should not be avoided? He regrets his last words to Arthur were a lie, and yet nowhere does he warn him father of the dishonour of his affair with Guinevere. Also, although, as Galahad says, slaying Arthur's enemies may offer him the only way to regain his honour, at times he borders on the bloodthirsty ("kill many of them for me","thank him? For wasting time in useless revelry instead of seeking and slaying the alien invaders?"). He is adventure-hungry to excess, and his self-sacrifice seems a natural result of his eagerness for action.

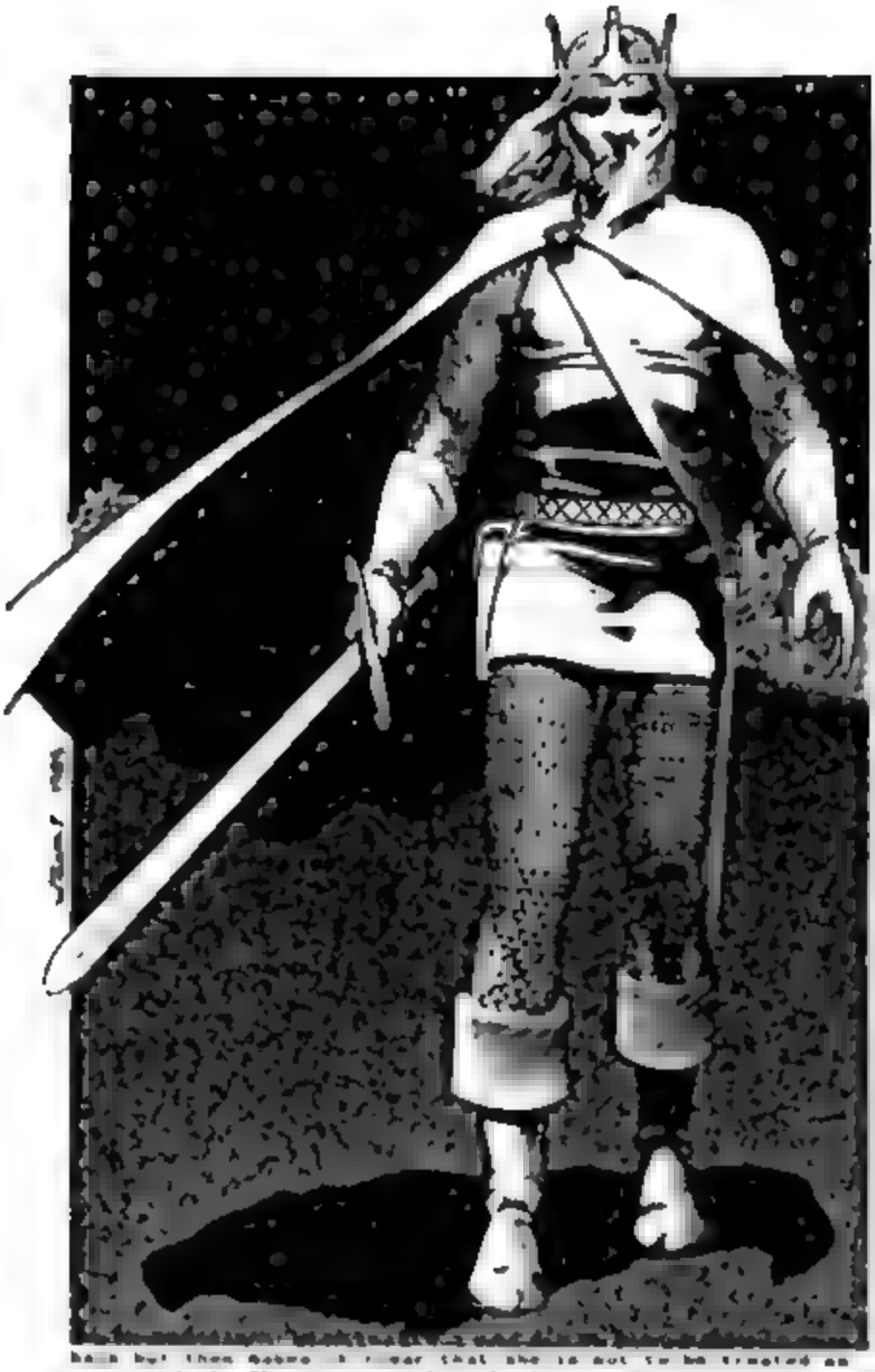
Clearly limited space accounts for some of the poor treatment of Galahad, and yet Gawain also is not as prominant as other knights in the plot, but is handled adequately. In Malory, Gawain feels the ties of blood to his brothers, and, in C3000, he is another kind of family man, and yet is forced to set aside his duty to his wife and son to follow Arthur. In this respect he is different to Malory's Gawain, who, because of the deaths of his brothers Gaheris and Gareth, fights with Lancelot against Arthur's wishes (family is more important to him than obedience to his liege) and yet perhaps he is not too different as he did try to resist Merlin's call. As a Round Table member, Gawain wants to see his family frequently, but is always ready to serve Arthur with either his fighting skills or his knowledge as a scientist. (In a panel characteristic of the formal humour of the series, he recovers immediately from his arm wrestling fight and drinking session torpor, and such comedy is not too far removed from Malory who presented Lancelot clearly out of his element up a tree in A Noble Tale of Sir Launcelot du Lake.)

Percival too serves Arthur loyally, although, as a mutated criminal, a mad man, he can contribute little but the obedience of his fellow mutates and his bludgeoning strength. (Violent scenes, like Percival pounding two aliens, are in the spirit of Malory, who, judging from the profusion of blood and guts in his works was clearly interested in gory descriptions of fighting.) He is presented to us as religious (praying to see the Grail) and unprejudiced (he stops Tristran hitting Kay despite the fact that Kay is, or at least seems, antipathetic to him.) It is his desire to see the Holy Grail which provides his link to Malory. He saw it a image in his last life and wants to see the actual thing this time.

New Camelot should cut through prejudice (note Guinevere's words "But no matter what you look like.. you're one of us."), but one knight who actively practices intolerance is Sir Kay. He balks at serving with a woman and reacts with an unsheathed sword to having to treat a neo-man as an equal. He is shown the error of his ways, and, in 2 clever panels, the four characters who stand to be inconvenienced most by his bigotry look on at him. However, Kay's attitude is an attempt to unite the Round Table by turning its members against himself, for, as he tells Arthur, he is not strong or brave but a wit, and his contribution to New Camelot lies in that area. (Barr is close here to the depiction of Kay as a high ranking but weak knight in the works of Malory after The Tale of King Arthur.) It is this shrewdness which prevents him closing with Owen, and yet we should also impute cowardice to his motivation too, for, when we first see Kay, he is running away from danger, and, when Arthur rises to find the traitor in his camp, Kay is plainly scared. Indeed, when it is discovered he betrayed the Round Table, he tries to escape, but his other major trait, his love for Arthur, makes him double back and take the blast intended for the King. He is the Judas Knight (urged IF for different reasons, like Accolon in Malory, into treason by Morgan), but he makes good in the end, and would not have resorted to treachery anyway, if Merlin had aided him when he asked.

Thomas Prentice, the last knight of the Round Table, has no equivalent in Malory, but, as a key figure in Camelot 3000, he deserves attention. He is in the tradition of Luke Skywalker, and yet the role of such a boy hero is fitting for an Arthurian storyline, as it has affinities to the situation of the romance hero who tests himself in the world after leaving or being deprived of his parents, and establishes for himself an identity and a new life. Certainly Tom undergoes a process of maturation in the 12 issue series. He starts off scared and unsure after the death of his parents, but, at the end, asserts his will over the normally dominant Tristran, supervises the rebuilding of London and tries to uphold Arthur's standard of honour. His organising of the reconstruction is also an attempt to work away the pains of love, for Tom has a deep affection for Tristran, but, in the end, he only receives thanks for his concern and gets to wish her well in her life with Isolde. (The Tom who talked sense when he told Tristran she could like life as a woman is proven correct, but, by one of those ironies which permeate the series, not in the way he thought, not in a heterosexual relationship.) The other love in Tom's life is King Arthur whom he admires greatly. Arthur recognises Tom's worth by not testing his loyalty, as it is beyond question, and then Tom shows his devotion and steadfastness by wishing to stay to ascertain the identity of the betrayer, and later shielding Arthur from radiation.

Those are the heroes of Camelot 3000, but the series also has two notable villains, Morgan le Fey & Modred. In Malory, Morgan le Fey is an everpresent trouble-maker, but, for all her magic and murder, she does not really rise to the position of arch-villainess that she has in C3000. In the comic, she is crafty, calculating and callous. She manipulates Jordan Matthew, not revealing his parentage until it suits her, and monitors Arthur's moves, occasionally entering the fray herself to try to intercept the energy bursts from Excalibur or to blast Guinevere's communicator. She is like a puppetmaster and hence her anguish when Modred wrests control from her, although she still manages to give her orders at decisive moments. Her schemes are heartless, as shown by the way she changes the environment of a planet to please herself and then steals its children. The real extent of her evil is seen in her exploitation of love and innocence though, as she deviously hires Isolde and uses her as a lure to tempt Tristran into betrayal, and, as she perverts the sex instinct of Owen McAllister so that, in his revived form, he becomes a bulbous mass with suspiciously phallic protuberances, wanting to possess and impregnate Tristran on his first return from the dead, and then merely to kill her on his second. The reason why Morgan can use sex in such a way though is because she is aware of it on many levels. She admits she might be interested in Tristran as a male, and her appeal to Tristran is by their common factor--womanhood("little sister"). She addresses Tristran playing on something the latter is painfully conscious of,but also there is the sense of them needing to stick together as women in what is still a man's world (notice how Jordan Matthew assumes his new assistant will be a man.) Morgan allows Matthew to caress her



back by them before I hear that she is not to be treated as a sex object. She stresses that she is an individual in her own right and "will not be used." Here Mike Barr is asserting the legitimacy of women as equals just as he does by making Guinevere Joan Acton, the kind of woman to whom Arthur's overprotectiveness is somewhat redundant. Morgan succeeds in a world of powerful men by being wilier than them (she does not allow Matthew to attack Arthur with United Nations troops as it will look suspicious.) For all her clever machinations though, she is out-thought by the "stubborn, plodding and tenacious" Arthur, as she never imagined that the Grail could still exist. She calls off her attack showing the same self-ishness she exhibited in keeping mercury her sole province on the 10th planet. Her initiation into the mysteries of Chiron magic has a price though--the disease which Merlin later uses against her. It is Arthur who finally destroys her, which is appropriate, as it is suggested he will be a ridder of diseases. (Jules Futrelle calls the alien invasion a "disease", and Morgan le Fey is both the controlling force behind that disease and diseased herself.)

Morgan's uneasy ally is Modred who appears in issue 4 as Jordan Matthew, a scheming back stabber of a United Nations Security Director. His dress and posturing reveal he is something of a smarmy dandy, and we see his ostentatism later in the style of his armour. He is in league with Morgan because she is right more often than not, but his emphasis on the first person pronoun indicates that he is too much of an egotist to be interested in a partnership, if it were not greatly to his advantage. Indeed, we actually see him plotting against Morgan. His devious, cruel exterior hides an insecure emotional side of him though, which comes to the fore when Morgan reveals his parentage. Here Barr adapts Malory and has the infant Modred almost drowning by Arthur's own hand, whereas The Tale of King Arthur has him sent out to sea with all the other May-born babies by Arthur's command, for one of them was to be his downfall, and would have been a rival to a legitimate heir, should one have been born. Modred, once a threat to the throne, becomes one again in C3000 by wanting to kill his father once more. However, despite his attempted patricide, there is the sense that things could have been different and Modred is something of a victim. He feels Arthur lies when he says,"I do sorely regret what I must do, but--". He feels unwanted, that Arthur always wanted him dead, and in many respects is a man of childish emotions who basically just wants to be loved.

The Arthurian legend is famous not only for its characters though, but also for its 'set pieces' (Sword in the Stone, the love triangle, the Quest for the Grail, and Morte), and we should now look at how Barr handles these features of the tradition.

In Malory, the Sword in the Stone incident is the means by which Arthur claims the throne, and, after doing so he then receives Excalibur from the Lady of the Lake. In C3000, Arthur from his very first appearance is a King, and yet he still undergoes a test. He is warned away from [illegible] by weather spirits and [illegible] a "pretender to the throne" and a "usurper", and, needing to prove his birthright, he frees Merlin. Excalibur is then sought,but Merlin delays Arthur's reception of it, until he draws it (complete with Malory-derived inscription) from a stone in the United Nations building, and thereby proves he is King of Britain to an "over-populated much-beleaguered globe". Thus, there is a similiar proving of worth as in Malory, before Excalibur is gained, and C3000 delays the public demonstration of Arthur's heritage until after a more private show of merit, just as the boy Arthur draws the sword in Malory from a stone in a deserted churchyard, and later has to repeat the procedure for others. Excalibur, in C3000, is more than just a sword, it also houses the memories of some of the former inhabitants of Camelot in light burst form, and can re-charge power cells. These energy-related properties are not as far-fetched as they initially appear, for they have some preparation in Malory: "Thenne he drewe his sword Excalibur, but it was so bryght in his enemyns eyen that it gaf light lyke thirty torchys." The aspect of Excalibur we see most often though is its effectiveness in Arthur's hands, and indeed it is the means of splitting the atom in the final issue, thus destroying Morgan and her threat. However, although Arthur Pendragon is dead at the end, on an alien planet a new Arthur emerges and his coming to prominence is once more heralded by the drawing of a sword from a stone.

The complicated relationship of Guinevere, Arthur and Lancelot really starts off when Guinevere resolves to meet Lancelot with the others, an announcement that elicits a hurt look from Arthur. His face is glum once more as Lancelot kisses his Queen's hand. As Morgan says,"the triangle still exists", and the King King's earlier statement that "the heart of Guinevere is Arthur's" is quickly put under pressure. An issue later it is well strained, for Guinevere, despite initial resistance, embraces Lancelot ecstatically and Arthur, as before in Malory, says nothing, though it causes him anguish. Nix is not the only pain though, as Lancelot becomes a modern Saint Paul, and Joan Acton loses control of her personal life, now that she has memories that belong to Guinevere. Their situation gives the Round Table the problem of potential internal strife, for the love of Lancelot and Guinevere caused its downfall once, and already "they remance as before", as well as the danger of the external threat (Morgan and the aliens.) One must not forget Guinevere's dutifulness to and respect for Arthur, which should not be underestimated; as Lancelot says, Guinevere's is "the heaviest burden of all", and he knows about such predicaments for the kingdom may cost Arthur love, while his own love for Guinevere may cost him his King, a real loss, as he and Arthur are best friends. (This is explained to Tom, who, like the knights in Malory, realises what is going on between Guinevere and Lancelot, but talks about it furtively.) That Arthur's love is subservient to his love of his subjects is proved by the

way he enters a marriage, which could be ruined by adultery to fire the spirits of his subjects and give power to his enemies. The news of the wedding astonishes Guinevere but it produces the reaction in Lancelot to end their relationship, and Guinevere, although emotionally involved accepts this, as revealed by her tender kiss and affectionate glances to Arthur in issue 6 Arthur does not know his best knight has abandoned his passion for the good of the Round Table and probes him, when he asks to escort Guinevere to the alter. Arthur's fears are assuaged by Lancelot's answers and the scene ends in a friendly handshake with trust re-established. The affair starts up again when Guinevere is killed, and Lancelot prays to God for her life, proving the truth of his earlier proclamation of love ("I would still my heart as yours could beat again, I would give my breath so that you could breathe again.") This is possibly the most unsatisfying part of the whole series,as, even though it is prepared for, it is totally unexplained. In a sense it is Lancelot's duty to resuscitate Guinevere, as he swore to protect her, and we know it is with God's help that he gets Guinevere to recover, for his closeness to God is seen again later when he revives from Modred's killing blow, an interesting variation on Malory's old might through right theme. However Guinevere's return from death is too significant an occurrence to just casually and inexplicably insert, even if it does give Guinevere a reason for recommencing her affair with Lancelot. Their passion is interrupted by Arthur in a panel without captions, which harks back to the minimal use of words in the royal wedding sequence; and the penalty for their adultery is banishment from New Camelot, something Lancelot submits to without complaint, although, strictly speaking, the orbiting asteroid is his. Lancelot tries to explain, but Arthur is too grief-stricken to listen, just as later his misery causes him to neglect his duty and transfer President Marks' call to Kay. Arthur feels the distance between his private and public worlds. Merlin's capture, however, rescinds the banishment, although it does not stop Arthur's pain (he calls Guinevere "woman" and makes the cutting remark,"As always" when she says,"Sir Lancelot speaks for me, my liege!") Arthur quickly re-establishes his friendship with Lancelot, but continues to have difficulty addressing Guinevere ("my--Commander Acton") although he does recognise her as his Queen, after she apologises and leaves for Glastonbury Tor. The Grail having been found and lost, Guinevere is put in another awkward position, as she sees Lancelot (in a way) forced to embrace Elaine, the mother of his son in his last life, if he wants to reach the 10th planet Reunited with Arthur, Guinevere still finds that he can only acknowledge her to her face as Commander Acton. He also directs a comment about misplaced trust at her. He is clearly still affected by her breach of faith, but does finally forgive her, and, before his death, wishes her well in her life with Lancelot Arthur's love causes him to make the noble gesture, &, when Guinevere finds herself pregnant, another advantage of her Joan Acton form, as she was barren in her first existance, she hopes the child is the King's, a wish that Lancelot, after a moments thought, echoes, & which shows the high regard for Arthur that both possess

Barr, in his explanation of what the Holy Grail is, states that it was used to hold communion at the last supper, and also collected the holy blood of Christ on the cross, and, in so doing, suggests the 2 properties Malory focussed on most frequently in The Tale of the Sankgreal: its eucharistic nature and its healing power as a container of Christ's blood. Unlike Malory though, Barr does not make Galahad the key figure in the Quest which allows Percival, the original Grail hero of French romance, to assume the prominent role, a role which is fitting for him, as he and the dying Tom have most need of its powers. It is to Percival that God gives the sign that the Grail exists at Glastonbury Tor, and we feel that God is helping him, which is more than the others do (Guinevere said she would aid him but we never actually see her doing anything for him, and Tristram's efforts are ineffectual.) Certainly he is close to God as shown by his diligent praying and the way he sees the man gesturing to them, proving indeed that "his standards are higher, and he seeks that which is beyond most men's understanding " Only Tom, who is near death, also sees him and this shows that Lancelot, despite dearly wanting to lay eyes on the Grail, is not destined to have a full encounter with it, just as he did not see it properly in his former life. Also similiar to Malory's Quest is the way the knights seem to vanish off the face of the Earth and shift to another plane of existance. Camelot 3000 has the mouth of the cave disappearing, and Malory has Ector not able to "hyre" of Lancelot, Galahad, Percival or Bors. In the cave there is a blinding light, and noticably Percival has the least trouble with it; and then the Guardian of the Grail, transformed into a boy, introduces a test. Percival has to find the Grail which is hidden as one of the 6 objects. Lancelot tells him to choose the crucifix, but "the best knight of this world" stresses the worldly glory of Christ too much, and the Grail is actually to be found as a block, a block which the childlike Percival selects, acting in accordance with his Uncle's advice that "ye must be little children to come unto him...or the See Greal." The Grail is thus obtained, Tom being cured by it, Percival transfigured. So far Barr has adapted Malory's The Tale of the Sankgreal well and so it is a pity that the sequence has to be spoilt by the confused revelation of the man's identity and transferral of the guardianship of the Grail. The Guardian says that he was chosen for the privilage of safeguarding the Grail because he was "part of the family of the Lord" and that Percival his nephew, was part of that bloodline in both his incarnations. This is garbled. In Malory, Lancelot was Christ's descendant, but the nearest Barr comes to establishing this is making Lancelot Guardian of the Grail, something that comes about in Percival's uncle's case because of his link to the Holy blood, but in Lancelot's seems to occur for no better reason than happening to be in the right place at the right time Quibbles aside though, Lancelot is too worldly to be a good Guardian, as he allows the Grail to be snatched by a flier's tractor beam, while he attends to the wounded Guinevere. He does take his responsibility seriously though; he is angry with himself for having failed & so obsessed with recovering the Grail that he downs Arthur. The Grail is not recovered. It is shattered and Lancelot smiles at its fate, as it means peace is brought to the Universe. The Grail was connected with Christ and, in a similiar way to Jesus' death bringing eternal life, the destruction of it, in an explosion that signifies victory, brings joy the shards of broken Grail give way to streamers and tape

The final winding down section in the city culminating in the Merts, is a human drama which separates the main characters (Arthur and Guinevere are split up because of the latter's adultery, and Gawain's hostility keeps Lancelot from Arthur and Camelot),& ends in a 1-on-1 confrontation between Arthur and Modred, a meeting fated to cause the King's downfall In C3000, Barr contrives it so that all the key figures are present for his grand finale, and the human drama aspect has been operating throughout the series There is still the battle between Arthur and his son,& a similiar element of fate, when Arthur says that he will attend to Morgan & Merlin adds "Yes..you will. In Malory, the Arthur-Modred fight ends with both falling,while, in C3000, it is the final Arthur-Morgan confrontation which ends so. This is appropriate as Arthur's half-sister is the main opponent to New Camelot. Experience has shown that death is not always final, which supplies the idea of Arthur returning at a later date. In the last 2 pages of the series, this idea is exploited as we see a new Arthur coming to the fore on an alien planet."And the road goes ever on..."

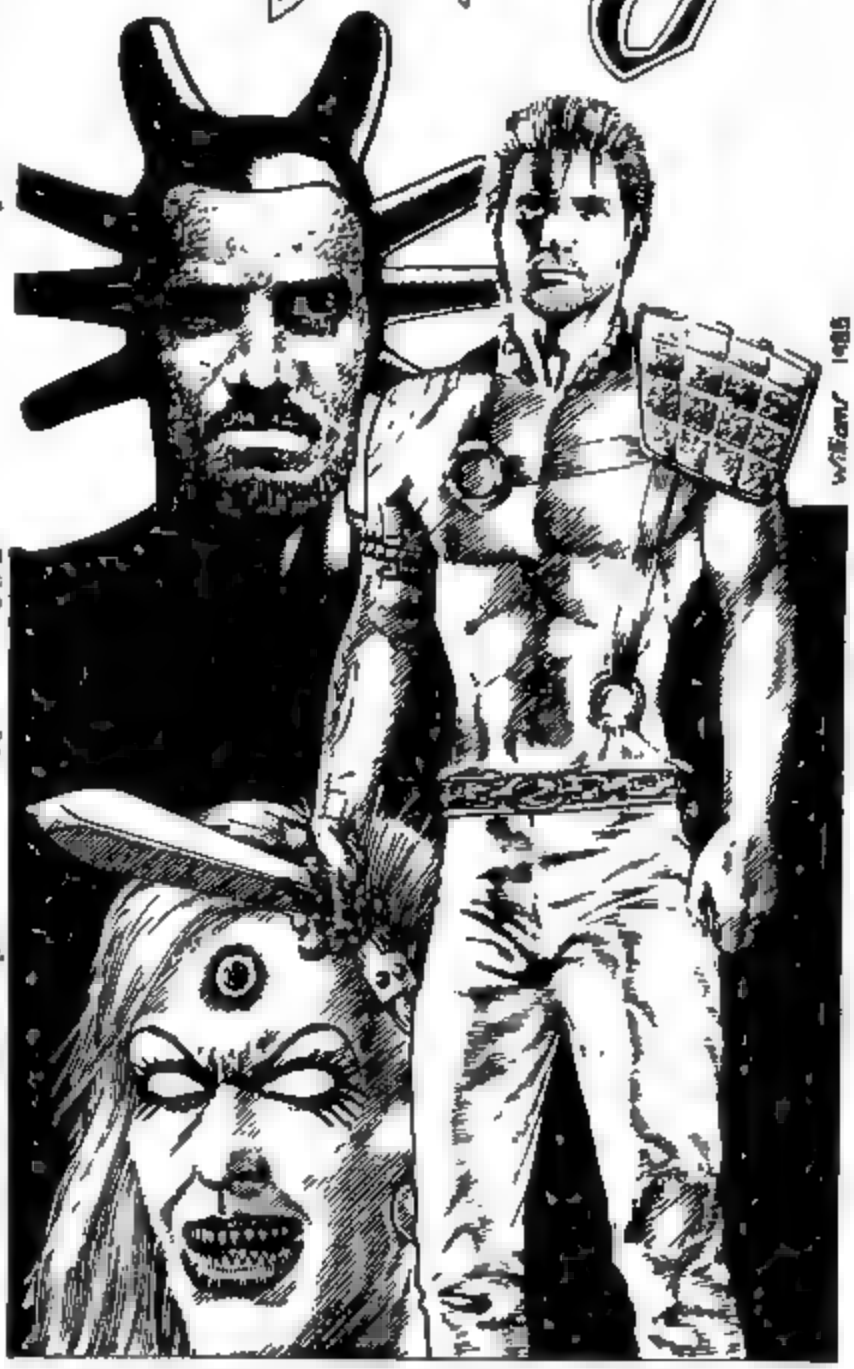
In looking at the established aspects of the Arthurian legend in C3000,we have noticed some touches to be present that are emphasised in Malory: the idea of the danger within and without,might through right,& the gap between public and private duty. Another similiarity between the fictions is the importance of the contempory issues. The War of the Roses impinges on Malory's works, leading,for instance, to a lot of stress being put on the notion of loyalty to one's King Although Mike Barr may set his story in the year 3000, the features of life are distinctly 20th century: Idi Amin-like dictators,cowboy presidents,sickly, gushing TV presenters;apathy (the world is against space travel, and lost its questing spirit);inept political bodies like the UN General Assembly voting to only 'bitterly censure' the alien invasion rather than act,repressive methods of dealing with criminals (the neo-men); a dearth of housing, propaganda;and a general corruption

To conclude, leaving aside objections to the weak Galahad portrayal, the confused explanation about Percival & the Guardian of the Grail, Barr in general shows a good knowledge of Malory, and, while producing with the rest of the creative team on the series, a first-class comic, comes up with an enthralling and commendable science fantasy sequel to Malory. Purists may be offended, but the legend, like the road, goes ever on... ●

Martin Geary

IT'S GOT FIGHTS-
COME HERE AND SAY THAT, YOU SON OF A BITCH!
IT'S GOT TOUCHING SCENES OF EVERYDAY DOMESTIC LIFE
PASS THE SALT, HARVEY!
IT'S GOT DRAMA-
I THINK AAARGH! MIGHT BE APPROPRIATE
IT'S GOT PARTIES THAT LAST ALL NIGHT...
IT'S GOT ROMANCE-
LOOK AT THOSE BIG BAZOOMBAS!
SEEING ANYTHING YOU LIKE, BIG BOY?
IT'S GOT SPACE BATTLES-
ROAR
PASS THE SALT GODDAMN IT
BOOM
GULP!
IT'S GOT FROGS?
RIBBIT
IT'S GOT AN ENDING
SO YOU DIDN'T DIG AFTER ALL
NO SIR, I DIDN'T
HI FOLKS
I'M SORRY THAT I TRIED TO KILL YOU ALL- PLEASE FORGIVE ME
NGER
LAST ONE!

Glenn Fabry



Glenn Fabry is very new to the comics scene. He's only done a small amount of work so far, but he's made a big impact in 2000AD on Slaine

This big-star-of-the-future discussed Slaine with John Jackson at UKCAC'85.

Paul

Glenn Ask me a question. Go'on

John Right. You started off with a fanzine. How did that come about?

G:That was something I did as a favour to a friend when I was about 16. I had this really pretentious story that I had written myself, about this gang of spies who lived underneath the toilets in Waterloo Station. Bryan Talbot saw a copy of that magazine and he asked me to do some work for Near Myths which was fanzine that he was doing at the time. On the day that my work was about to appear in the paper it folded, and the bloke who handled the money for it ran off to Japan or somewhere. So I never got paid. Then, about 5 years later, I saw Bryan doing an art exhibition at a table in the Gloucester Hotel in London. I went up and stared at him intently for two minutes until he asked me who I was. And I said,"Glenn Fabry. Where's my money?" He said,"Oh, Glenn Fabry", and he bought me a drink and explained that Pat Mills was looking for a new artist for Slaine. Bryan had just started Nemesis then

J:What sort of training did you have in art?

G:I did four years of Illustration. Basically they just told you to illustrate something and you made up your idea and put it down on paper, with very little intervention from the teachers.

J:Why was that?

G They didn t like to teach you new techniques in case you used them better than they did. There was one instance when a professional illustrator, who taught us one day a week, said he really liked a painting one of my friends did. The next week it appeared in the NME with the pro's name on it. The only thing they teach you is to lay flat gouache and you also get the peculiar experience of being in a room of clothed people except for one naked person standing very still for long periods of time. It's disorientating at first.

J When you started Slaine did you look back at the previous episodes and try to copy what was done?

G I went straight into my own style because, like Bryan Talbot says - he started Nemesis after Kevin O Neill - there's no point in trying to emulate a rendering technique of a well-known artist because it just wouldn't make any sense from your point of view

I was helped by the fact that Slaine became almost a different character, visually, overnight His hair was different. His clothes were different Everyone changed except Ukko the Dwarf. He was the only one I looked back on for references.

J:How fast are you at drawing?

G:It really depends upon how many monsters and things Pat Mills asks me to do. I did just one page last week, for the second episode of the next story,((Now in print)) because it was just a picture of a tomb covered in gargoyles and ruins It's generally between 1½ and 2 pages a week which is fairly slow. I was speaking to Cam Kennedy and he said he does 7 pages in 10 days. I get about £150 a week, so I'm not superbly rich, but it's enough to live on after the taxman takes a third

J:How do you get on with Pat?

G:I haven't met him yet. As far as I'm concerned he looks exactly like a telephone because I've only spoken to him on the phone. So I've got a mental picture of him as a dial and a receiver I've been told he's fairly tall/ red-haired and about 40, and his daughter's a punk who likes The Stranglers

J:Do you change your scripts about?

G:The girl in Slaine, Nest, was going to be killed off but I thought they needed a strong female character, like Judge Anderson, so I got him to change the script. Originally she was going to be changed into a hideous monster by the Cythrons, and Slaine was going to have to kill her as an act of mercy. It later turned out that they killed someone the Cythron had put in the organic blender, and mistook her for Nest

J What do you think of the violence in Slaine?

G.The thing Pat Mills says about it is that if you perpetrate violence on monsters that are fantasy, then no little kid will have nightmares about it So you'll see in most of the work that David Pugh and myself do that you'll get really hideous scenes of Cythrons and Diluvians being destroyed, but anyone who's human doesn't even cut his little finger. You're supposed to get as much violence in as possible because that's what the kids buy 2000AD for.Violence and Humour. The two are inextricably linked in 2000AD

The other thing you can get with humans is that you can get their weapons covered in blood as long as it's not too frequently, and they can be covered in blood as long as you don't see the blow. It s all very peculiar

Left.A page from Glenn's "The Green T.V." which he did for his degree. This is the last strip work he did before starting on Slaine.

J:Have you ever been censored?
G Yes. In the first Slaine I ever did I had Slaine stick a sword into a thing with blood spurting out, so I had to white the blood out. Apart from that, no
J:How do you approach your layouts? Do you spend a lot of time on them?
G:At the beginning I didn't really draw layouts at all. I just made every panel more or less the same size. The secret to strong, powerful layouts is to choose the most violent panel in the page, make it really huge, and make the rest of it tiny, with little figures and enough space for the speech balloons and such. When you turn over and see a ½ page of Slaine looking out at you it's dramatic.
J:Where do you go for references to costumes and things?
G:I just make them up. Pat does send lots of references. Mostly cuts from Nations. Geograph c tagged on the end of his script, so that you just get the general idea of what he wants. Nothing s traced or copied, unless of course it's supposed to be historically correct. Some of the ends have to be the same as the suits were otherwise it was a tag along with the research side of things very heavily researched, Slaine is. Or so I've been told this weekend by people who know much more about it than I do.
J Where do you see yourself going from here?
G To the bar.
I was asked if I'd like to draw Judge Dredd, but I don't know. I'd fancy doing a one off thing. He's a good character and all the rest of it, but it's the technological aspects of the design that I may not be suited to. Basically my only real talent when I do my work is that I get the faces and figures right. The environments so far because Slaine is a barbarian who goes around with swords I really don't need to design any technology. Have a done most of the design for the architecture apart from the new story, where I do it.
J Have you ever thought of writing for yourself?
G Ideally, in about 20 years time, if I'm still doing comics, I'd like to write and draw my own comics, because I've got a few ideas for characters and things like that. They'd all be really silly I don't think they'd be like the ones in 2000AD at all.
J Have you tried anything in colour?
G Yes, I used to do a lot of painting. In fact, I'd done about 5 really large paintings for this children's book that I was working before I got the job drawing Slaine. That was a kind of Brian Froud rip off. I sold the paintings when I got the job at 2000AD. Those took ages longer to do. About two months. Really fine detail.
J Do you see yourself going over to America?
G I don't think I would go over to America because I draw for a comic, and they seem so incredibly efficient. They really do draw quickly. John Byrne does 5 pages a day or something ridiculous like that. To me that's terrifying.
J:Do you think a Graphic Novel would be more your style?
G Yes. I do want to do a Graphic Novel. I think Pat mentioned that he might be thinking about doing one, but that's by no means 100% sure. It's just something he said over the phone to me. "Would you like to do a Graphic Novel one day, Glenn?" he said. I said, "Yes, Pat."●

THRILLER

You are standing on the Brooklyn Bridge, staring into the night waters of the Hudson river. You can barely remember your mother and you have lost both father and twin brother to brutal deaths. You followed them everywhere. And then you look up into the sky and it fills with a womans face looking down at you...

Daniel Grove, news cameraman, weak and lost and alone, looked up and found Angeline Marietta Salvatori Thriller. Daughter of a clown, wife of a scientist, mother. Mother to more than a little baby, Scotty. Thriller was 'dead', but she lived on, the soul, so to speak, of a body she shared, in a fashion, with her husband Edward. She could animate inanimate matter, merge with her twin brother Tony because of their corresponding genetic structures, and she could foresee parts of the future

"She has seven seconds to save the world " That was the hype-line DC were using in the early part of 1981, to trail their new, open-ended Baxter stock series, "Thriller". Drawn by fan-favourite Trevor Von Eeden, the comic was actually to be written by someone who'd never been heard of before, a rank newcomer, Robert Loren Fleming

Fleming, who had sold an unpublished story to DC,was working there as a proof reader (it paid for groceries) when he took a chance on taking to Managing Editor Dick Giordano a 7½ page treatment of a pulp-influenced series, utilising certain concepts extended from The Shadow. Giordano bought it. Changes occured in the transition from treatment to comic, most notably in the change from what was almost an animistic force (Thriller Mark 1) to the personified humanity of Angie; suggestions from pros like Wein or Levitz, but ideas that were clearly shaped by Fleming.

"Thriller" aquired an artist. Trevor Von Eeden had made a name for himself but was only now coming to the realisation that comics and art were, for him, a career and means of expression, and not just fun. He took to the atmosphere, of hard edged fantasy, simultaneously closer to the ground and further out, of the book's '50 years into the future milieu', and he produced character designs and a dank, black tone that solidly established the look and roots of Thriller: film noir; the influence of Alex Toth; a curiously experimental style of tale-telling

And Thriller began, running. That first issue was a bold 'throw the reader in at the deep end and make him swim' type issue, fast and furious, a rapid flicker of event and character. It made two immediate points. One, that this was to be a subjective ride, with the story told as strongly as possible from the internal viewpoint of its characters, without the usual omni-present narrator, nor any concession to formality. The other was that this was an adult comic, where the Comics Code Authority were not watching & so there would be violence of a more serious & lasting kind,but even with that there would not be the juvenile glorying in savage death that so often occured: no Omega Men welter of gore.

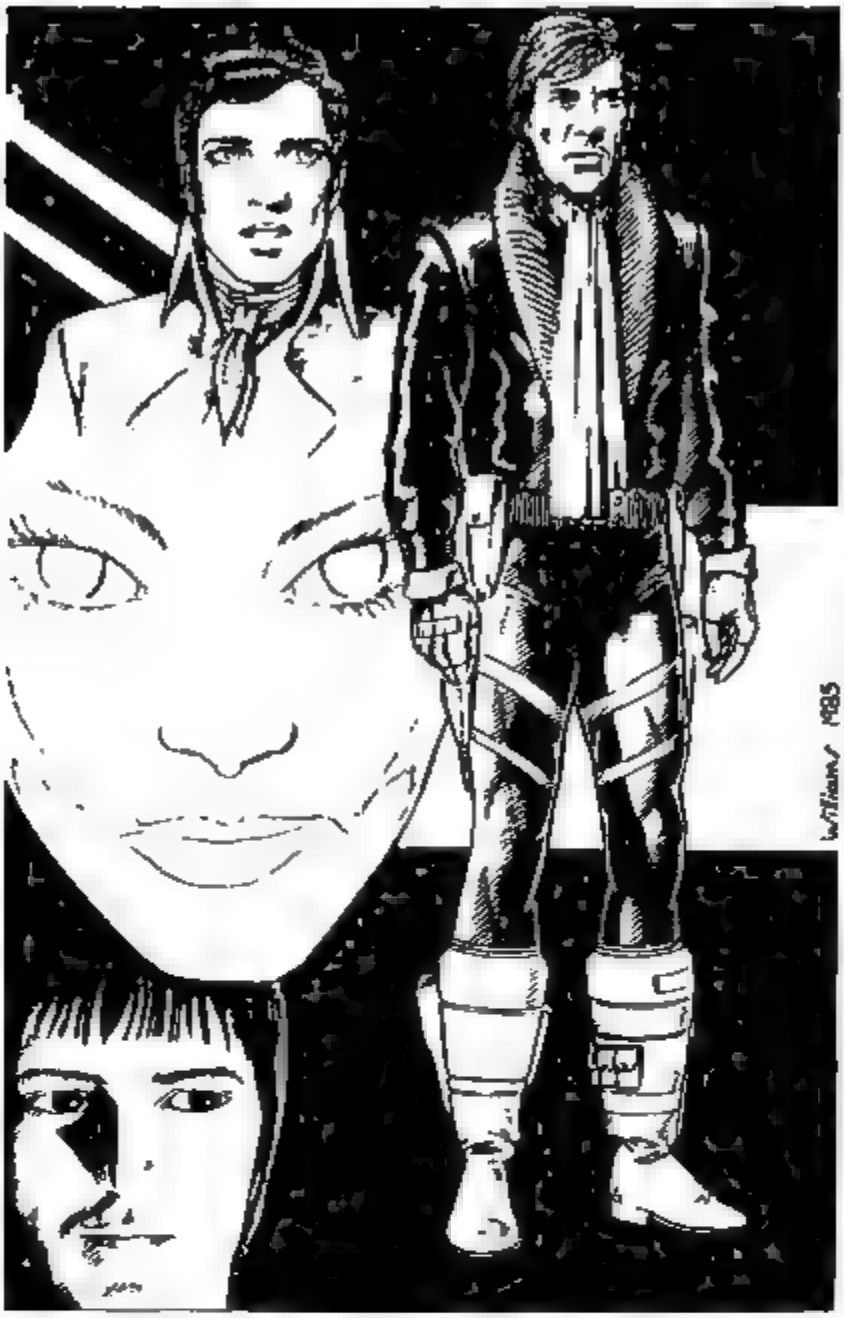
It took mainstream comics to extremes and then tilted them on their side. Dan Grove chased brother Ken through the alleys of Mecca, where Molluskan terrorists, religious fanatics, had taken hostages in a demand for the life of William Martin, US President. The Groves chased war-correspondent glory until they ran into Scabbard, the Ayatollah made comic-book flesh, wielding a sword that he sheathed in the skin of his back "I am the hand that cleans. And this is the instrument of Death." Someone distracted Dan, so that he only filmed, instead of died, trying to prevent the decapitation of his brother..

And Angie Thriller, mother figure in the sky, distracted him from the waters of the Hudson and pitched him (and us) headlong into The Seven Seconds. "She has Seven Seconds to save the world " remember? Not a measure of time but a team of operatives Or rather a family, an Italian family, said Fleming, which is always so much bigger than just the ties of blood

Dan ran some kind of gauntlet, until he was led to the Seconds home, the Trinity (there's a joke in there) Data, or Freddy Martin (son of the President), massive and impassive in a computer-linked Rolls (registration 4 TRAN...) that he drives via an interface from his mind White Satin, or Janet Valentine, who has a trick of tricking the emotions with a touch Salvo, or Tony Salvatori, crack marksman with a rigid code against killing and who's good enough not to need to Basker Parish, a 9 foot tall artificial man and a Roman Catholic priest Proxy or Robert Furlie, ex-actor, flesh burned away from-basing cocaine, now possessed of synthetic flesh that can be moulded to any guise but which melts every day. Crackerjack, or Jack, a twelve year old illegal Honduran immigrant and safecracker.

And Dan Grove Nobody special A bit weak. Never properly grown up. But Angie's seen the future and he's in it

Angie Thriller was the result of Fleming's decision to conceive of his Thriller character as having human form, rather than being some force that entered inanimate matter Her father was a clown who'd died saving her from a house fire that Tony had set Her mother was bounded in that fire, rushing in after her husband Angie saw her own husband, Edward, agonisingly dying in a lab experiment, trying to tap into a genetic rogue reel that appeared to be a uni-memory common to all She rushed in to save him Edward and Angie became one entity, body and soul, seperate but unitary Angie became some form of Earth Goddess Edward lost her, so completely for, being effectively her other side, only he was unable to see her, sense her, unable to know whether she still loves him, whether she knows how he misses her, or forgives him for what he has done



(All Edward has left is son Scotty. Hence their home is the Trinity. Father, Son and Holy Ghost?)

Angie Thriller rolled into one the two most heroic and inspirational concepts in Fleming's life;"A cross between Jesus Christ and my Mom." A curiously prosaic sounding concept,almost laughable, yet that simple notion characterised and transformed the entire series. Religion and the family, both observed in that special passionate Italianate style that is intense and serene simultaneously. It made Thriller a very distinctive concoction.

"Seven Seconds to save the World..." Scabbard threatened stability in the Middle East (always a dangerous place to do that) and also the President's life, and yet it was his assault on the Family, the Thriller family, that outraged, and which was fought through to issue 4 ("Happiness(bang bang shoot shoot)", a perplexing but magnificent title) Scabbard wanted Salvo to hit the President and his lover would be the blind Marietta Salvatori The Seven Seconds moved as a team, Dan Grove, the media representative demanded by Scabbard, as a part of it.

Religion and the Family The Fantastic Four has traded off its reputation as a family comic, and the X-Men has made feeble efforts in that direction but the Family, as a community,bound by the ties of Faith played a deeper part in Thriller than it ever had in any of these series, where ultimately it had never really been more than a way of differentiating one team from another.

Dan was the key to this mystifying world that Thriller moved in, and we learned as he learned Not all his new friends were necessarily sympathetic - Salvo in particular was hard to like - but within the Family people cared about them, and it became easier as we grew to understand something of them

If the other Seconds were whole, entire characters, with stories that we would get around to learning, the character that we saw grow was Dan, little by little becoming part of the Family by his willingness to commit himself to them, and thus little by little growing, as he also began to learn how to see his old family. A memory, of playing in the garden, is evoked as early as the final page of issue 1, immediately on arriving at the Trinity. Later, Angie and Bakker combine in some unexplained fashion (accomplished through the medium of the Confessional, of Faith) to re-create for Dan the circumstances of his father's death, for him to play his father s role, to learn and to understand, to earn the courage to place himself with the Seconds in their assault on Scabbard

More would follow. That first 4-part sub-unit of 'Down-Time' seemed to lead into an indeterminate area, as Thriller 5 & 6 concerned itself with the bizarre life of Kane Creole (Any resemblance to Elvis Presley...) Seen in the context of the 12-part story Fleming was shaping, these two issues, and the shaping plot emerging out of no. 7 had parts to play that would, in all probability, have fitted, loosely but logically, as all in the series seemed to do by some point or other. At the time they provoked complaint, as essentially character pieces, seeming to lack direction. Creole was chased around by the Seconds twice, and invited to dinner in the third story. What else happened? Not a lot

One thing - two rather, but interdependant - did happen, in that 5th issue, a gloriously redemptive issue, as Edward Thriller's doubts, pains and loss were suddenly answered by words 'written' on a note, by Angie, and by the physical presence of her love, her heart, beating beside his At the same time, Dan Grove, finding one family, had returned to him another, in the image of his mother: an album of photographs from which she had been torn, in his father's pain of loss, was made whole by Angie, a gift, just as much as her love was making Dan whole.

Both were difficult concepts to express in comics, with its tradition of punchem-innaface action, yet both moments,moments of life, light and bright colour were vividly portrayed by Von Eeden, and touched beautifully with Fleming's spare,elliptical but exact dialogue

Questions still bubbled in the background and one major subline of questions awaited resolution Scabbard's woman had been Malocchia, she of the hypnotic eyes. But Malocchia was also Molly Lusk, daughter of Edward's lab-partner Moses Lusk (Mollusk? As in Mollusken terrorists?) And Molly was Scotty Thriller's nurse, which all together had to raise serious questions about the mysterious Moses.

And in the brain, after Scabbard s death, when Angie merged with Bakker to heal her mother's fractured skull, a strange thing happened A man named Quo, the man who distracted Dan Grove at the moment of his brother s death, confronted Malocchia/Molly - and somehow caused the exchange of her eyes for the blind eyes of Marietta Salvatori

Curiouser and curiouser Add to it the slow rise towards prominence of the START computer company and hints that a Soviet-American clash was to be engineered, and around White Satin, alias Janet 'Jet' Valentine, air pilot, Tony's girl, Quo s wife (or rather ex-wife since he, like Angie, is 'dead'...) things were shaping up to either a horrendous mess or a balanced and intriguing story

Which it was to be we shall never know for after Thriller 7, Robert Loren Fleming left

He'd proclaimed his love and commitment to this comic, to this dream, but he'd sold the dream to a big company and they won't always let you play with your dreams as you would, and you can t take them back Von Eeden had put a face on Thriller but he and Fleming were 'disagreeing' (at first point, should rumour be believed) and couldn't work together any longer And Alan Gold, editor,

was clearly in favour of a more open and traditional approach to story-telling, that left less to the imagination.

Fleming created Thriller but he took the walk when it went wrong. By all accounts he did jump; yet who would DC have backed, had he pushed it to the crunch? Their fan-favourite artist or their untried writer? Or a writer period?

It's been a long, long time since we've seen a brightly burning series suddenly extinguished, since the bright and burnished idea left the hands of the creator for far more professional and commercial hands. The results were depressingby the same however As with Gerry Conway's New Gods, as with Bill Mantlo's Howard the Duck, Bill DuBay's Thriller stank.

Superficially, there was an air of fidelity, and for one issue there was the familiarity of Von Eeden, but then he was gone, and his successor, Alex Nino, was conventionally minded enough to opt for the objective viewpoint, with the more traditional forms of layout. Not only that, but Nino's art was plain ugly, his figures and faces more than usually stylised, and in many cases looking very rushed indeed. Thriller stopped being a puzzle and became a pain.

DuBay was the main culprit for the failures that were to come. He picked up on certain things that Fleming had worked towards; Moses Lusk, ubiquitous newsman Ronald Morris, lengthy 'origins' for Salvo & Beaker that Fleming had detailed in an 'Amazing Heroes' preview (uncredited). Each of these things were shaped to DuBay's own ends. The result, which attempted to be far clearer than Fleming ever had, but which was far, far more confusing, was to be openly at odds with the spirit of Thriller.

For the personal, the family, was substituted Bondish espionage, crossbred to a Reagan-teasing Soviet bashing, and Global Thermonuclear Holocaust. For the unusual was substituted the stereotypical, like Tony's brutish macho-man dialogue, in place of his earlier vulnerable toughness, or Jack's cry of "Shoot'" for his idiosyncratic speech (no "Mama"s or "Christmas'", thank the Lord)

Worst of all was where it seemed that DuBay set out to openly debase Fleming's work. Salvo, whose creed was "Only Flesh wounds! Only OUT-Patients! I won't kill a fly . so don't ask me", is pushed into killing by his own sister in each of DuBay's first two issues and willingly does so in the one after. Data leaves his car on two occasions - definitely not a sight to behold in Nino's hands. Beaker suddenly displays a heal-all ability, as well as losing at least 10 years of his life, whilst White Satin's nerve pinch disappears entirely. Molly Lusk returned, at Moses aide, fully-sighted, without a word of explanation - damn near without a word, period

DuBay's original work was also sloppy. White Satin, kidnapped to Russia as a ploy to decoy the Seconds into the USSR, is summarily tranquilised and dumped at the airport for anyone (Beaker) to find her, once the team have entered the country. Salvo is the protege of Colonel Bishop Fortune in no. 8 but of Colonel Moses Trench in no. 10. William Martin has apparently been US President for something like 16 years, which is not only an impossible burden but forbidden by the American Constitution

But the worse comes with DuBay's treatment of Angeline Thriller herself. "Jesus Christ and my Mom", remember? Not only does Mrs. Thriller get out-Angled by Faith Verity, controller of the FIRST Seven Seconds, but she is swiftly revealed to be the daughter and paramour of Moses Lusk, and to have been living a lie all along, to family, family, husband and child

The final 3 issues of Thriller, in addition to what can only be called the perversion of Angie Thriller, featured what might be imagined to be DuBay's tour-de-force ending, Thermonuclear death, resurrection, replayed and averted. At the end of it, even the most careful of readers are left with no idea of who is supposed to have been doing what, or why. The confusion is complete and utter

I will say no more, except that I hope that, just as DC have expunged Conway's New Gods and 'Swamp Thing turned human' stories from continuity, DuBay's efforts will also, and soon, be declared non-existent

Thriller was a noble but frustrated experiment Like its more successful sister title, Swamp Thing, it was a writer dominated series, that featured a strong and different artistic appearance Both subverted genre expectations, in pursuit of a more adult sensibility than other mainstream (and many independant) comics. Both came from DC, the supposedly staid comics giant, and both do/did in full measure, what we wanted but have not yet fully had from the Independant market

A nagging thought insinuates itself Was not Thriller more suited to being an Independant title? It's sales were too low for DC to persist, but were they too low to maintain it in the world of First, Eclipse, Fantagraphics et al? Would not Fleming have had the freedom of his work there, freedom and possession, without interference?

A nice dream, but impractical to have begun with Von Eeden was hanging around the DC offices, not the Independants, and whatever their differences, Von Eeden's work was vital to make Fleming's ideas take flesh effectively. And are not Independants interested in packages, ready-made, not writers with a 24 page treatment?

Thriller was as volatile as a dream, and as subjective as an experience. A page of falling was a nightmare thing, where a helicopter droned low & it's blades sliced a page into ribbons of panels. A double-page spread of Dan Grove coming down to breakfast, meandered in a snaky line across and back, like someone not yet fully awake. An acrobatic clone of a rock star played tag with a grossly fat black man in a Rolls Royce, leaping and whooping, hauling down a billboard of his own face upon the faceless car, and all seen through the most ridiculous of tumbling angles. Thriller was a dream, was like a dream, [redacted] has gone, as a dream does

But not forgotten. Fleming's 1986 plans include a Thriller Special [a pilot for the return of the series, he hopes) plus a Superman team-up, both to be drawn by current Ambush Bug collaborator, Keith Giffen, who is of course now in his own Alex Toth period, of bizarre layouts and ideas. If Fleming and Giffen can work together as well on Thriller as on the Bug (and if the Bug's success doesn't swallow them up), then maybe we can see the improbable but attractive future of Thriller brought back to life in the only way possible - by Robert Loren Fleming. ●

Martin Crookall

Bill Sienkiewicz(right)

John Totleben(middle) & Steve Bissette(right)

RON SMITH

Wine, coffee, food and an afternoon chatting with Ron Smith. This is the life. Ron generously invited John Jackson and myself to his mansion in the wilds of Surrey, and this is the result.

Paul

Ron:In the 20s and 30s the depression was so bad that in the boy's schools art, drama and music were considered weekend activities, so you went for a recognised career like engineering, banking, insurance or the armed forces. Although I was interested in art I couldn t do it. I went straight from Grammar School to college to read Physics, and worked in an engineering drawing office. I accepted the King's Shilling - volunteered for the Royal Air Force - in 1944, but I didn t see any action because I hadn't completed my training by the time the war ended. When I came out in 1947, I saw an advert in John Bull magazine for an animation studio in Cookham, Berks. I had an interview and joined Everyone got the basic 6 months training It was almost like a home from home because it was filled with people from out of the services being trained as animators. We lived in and had our own bar. Wobby Clark was one of the people He was working with IPC until quite recently. Bob Monkhouse was another character. G B Animation Ltd was under the directorship of David Hand, an American who had been Walt Disney's first director, and the director of Bambi. I came in late, and all the character animators had already been picked, so when I finished the course I could only be an effects animator or an inbetweener. There was no way I was going to be an inbetweener.

Paul Because they do all the work

R:I was an effects animator. I animated water, rain, falling leaves etc. It was excellent because it had all the speed and energy that I later put into picture strips. You learnt how to make the background help the action.

The studio folded when J. Arthur Rank closed a whole lot of studios, even though we were making money. So you had 200 artists suddenly down at Fleet Street with more or less the same thing in their folders

John Was it a decent paying job, because in the early days of Disney money was hard to find?

R I received £4 10 Shillings a week. I gave back £2, and for that they totally kept me.3 meals a day, & a bed. At the end of the training if you were accepted you got a 15 year contract, but when it was broken that contract was only worth £30. That s what they paid me for it. I belonged to the Cinematograph Technicians Union and they never did a thing They came to Moor Hall and said it was a great pity & all the rest of it

P What projects did you work on?

R:I worked on Flash and Kitty for Esso Petrol, for the cinema, and the Animal Land Series. They ran in the late 40s.

P Were they any good?
R No. They were too slow, but they certainly had all the quality of a Disney film, because they drew virtually every frame. They didn't draw a sheet and shoot 6 frames. So it was expensive, but nothing short of the Disney finish would have sold on the Odeon cinema chain
J:From the animation you went on to Amalgamated Press from '39 to '51, working freelance. Did you find it easy to get work around then?
R Yes. What had happened was that all the illustrators under 40 had been called up in '39 so the old boys staggered through the war years and by 49 they'd really had it. The younger ones didn t necessarily want to do this end of the market. They wanted to try advertising, and TV There was a shortage of illustrators So I went up to AP and I was in print in 3 weeks That was a big risk Sun and Comet were totally new papers. I got the cover and I'd never drawn a strip in my life.
P:This early work was cartooning, which carried over from your animation work
R AP told me to do Young Joey, & at the same time I could do stints on Our Ernie and others. But I found that the people doing the straight strips were earning more money. There were more cartoonists than straight artists so the straight illustrators had more opportunities I'd never tried the straight stuff before I had no idea I could even do it.
J:A lot of the figures were very realistic. Did you copy from real life?
R No. Never
P Were you copying styles to fit in with other artists on the same strip? (Artists would do alternative episodes of the same strip)
R:I wouldn't go for D C Thomson's cross-hatching - I prefer drawing with a brush and I like solid blacks and whites & a clean line but I'd fit in. You would not like to stick out like a sore thumb in a paper.

At the beginning you pinch bits of styles from people you admire, but you soon give it up because if you don't have all their references around you then you d never hack the page. So your style comes from problem solving, "Let's get this thing up and get the damn thing finished " It s only later, when someone says to you that they saw your stuff that you suddenly realise you must have a recognisable style
J:Who influenced you?
R.Alex Raymond. The reason was that until Rip Kirby appeared in the Daily Mail there was a set of rules that still applied up in D C, Thomson's until 1955. The close-up was no closer than the head and shoulders, and the back of the head always had to be within the frame. In other words, if it wasn t the complete picture it wasn't a good drawing. So the frame was literally a picture-frame. You couldn't have anything coming into the frame that was cut off. Today you could establish a man was in a tweed jacket in frame one, and you could just have a hand and part of the tweed jacket sleeve, with a balloon stuck to it, in frame two. That wasn't on. Suppose you tried a street scene in the early 50s and you wanted to get a bit of foreground so you put a big tire of a parked car on the left hand side. The editor would know exactly what it was but he's say to you,"What s that spare wheel doing?" You'd <u>have</u> to draw half the car. Alex Raymond had the same problem. If you look at Tarzan in the 30s they were all complete pictures. With Flash Gordon Raymond started to use what everyone else wanted to use, which were the cinema techniques. He started to have characters in profile breaking through the frame. It wasn't accepted here. They said that people wouldn't read it. Then when Rip Kirby came across, and did so well, the editors at AP and D C Thomson didn t like it. Nevertheless, when they found that the Mail readers accepted it - it was the best strip of the year for several years until Raymond's death in a car crash - we went back and said,"It works " Eventually they allowed us to cut off a little bit of the back of the hand, and come up to the top of the neck with closeups
P All the early strips remind me of illustration, where there'd be a block of text and a picture The picture would be described by the text. That isn't a comic strip to me, that s a series of illustrations
R:That really died out in the early 40s, but Thomsons were still doing that with some of their papers aimed at children under the age of 10.

At one time all the pictures at Thomsons were exactly the same size. You were given a sheet, and you put holes in the right places to get 9 perfect little rectangles, with the gaps inbetween for the text. You had type under the picture and the odd balloon crept in
P Who were the other people involved in the comics at the time?
R:I only knew Derek Ayels and Eric Parker. Those were the two major strip artists. Eric Parker was a general man who worked on boys papers and annuals from the 30s,& Derek Ayels was a cowboy artist. You didn't see the other illustrators. You've got to remember too that everything was very formal. The editorial staff were suits, ties, waistcoats. They all looked like bank staff. When you brought your work in it was to a set time and you went with a collar,tie &

There he's got for getaway Black Hand!
The morning was saved King Cobra's life. Although he was knocked unconscious by the blast, the head followed automatic pilot.
He's only knocked out!
We have other ways of dealing with him. But first, later we'll make plans
King Cobra faces the fangs of death!
Wh-hah... what's on it? Ah, a snake... a cobra!
The snake didn't know what it had in two fangs. They're hollow syringes!

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jacket They didn t encourage you to meet There weren t get togethers You went to the office, left your stuff in and left with your script

P You didn t even know who wrote your scripts then?

R No I didn t know at Thomsons either Half of it was written by the staff and the other half they always scribbled out the name of the author

I must mention Ken Matthews who was probably one of the finest editors that Amalgamated Press ever had He went on into Fleetway and he s still around somewhere in the business.

P Why do you say he's a fine editor?

R Because he pushed people out and he was very aggressive He wouldn t say Ron this drawing aint gonna make it He would actually put it on the floor and stand on it so that there was this vast print of a boot on it, to really push home that there was no way that he would print it I thought I really mustn t bring in stuff like that But he was giving you opportunities He was taking a risk

P To prove yourself to him

R Yeah But the difference between that man and all other editors was that he was the only one I ve ever worked with who d been an artist All the others had come through the editorial and they worked well with the script man

P I think that a lot of editors think that once a script s done it s finished

R Yeah The artist rewrite Without a good script you can have the finest illustrator in the world and you re not in a hope But you put a hack artist onto a decent script and you might still get the readers for quite a while

J So you never really make any changes to the script?

R No There used to be a whole long run of Second World War stories at Thomsons and often I d make a little alteration here and there, especially in air warfare stuff

P Because of your own experience

R Yes There s script I ve just drawn for 1000AD there are 5 Messerschmitts in Mega City One They re rammed on a time warp and the script said that these 6 planes are flying through the city in line astern and they are all opening fire Now if you imagine that

Paul They d be destroying each other!

R So I said well I don t think I ll quite draw them that way round I think they d have been in some sort of recognised formation

Hotspur actually tied a new thing at one time We did war stories where you started off with a large photograph actually taken on the battle-front and then ran into the picture stories

P:Did you have a preference for war stories because you knew about the aircraft?

R No. It was just that Thomsons had a policy. They're still fighting it in Victor now. I got the air action ones simply because there was a chance of me getting them right. There were other people who'd been in the tank corps and so on

J Did you use much reference for the planes?

R I really don't need that much reference for that stuff on battles. The aircraft recognition we had to do was so intensive I could sit down now and draw them line for line

J:What made you leave Amalgamated Press in 1951?

R:That was because I got married. I was living in a flat in London. It was all bombed every-where, and we were living 70 steps up. D C. Thomson ran a competition and, of all places, they put an ad in The Times. I didn t read The Times, but one of my wifes aunts read it and it said 'Draw 6 action pictures and win £100.' I drew them and won £100, and that's when Thomson invited me up to see them

I wasn't too certain that AP would always have me employed. The straight stuff - I was doing Champion as well - always had good people around When I picked up a script I didn't always know I d be able to do it. It was always when I finished that I'd realised that I'd produced something, but I was never happy with it. I didn't really feel secure at all.

P Can we talk about what was good and bad about D.C.Thomson?

R They were nearly all good. The questionaire was first Are you a member of the Trades Union? Are you considering to become a member? Are you of the Catholic faith? Are you of the Jewish faith? Do you belong to an art agency - or would you freelance through an agency after starting with D.C.Thomson? The answer "Yes" to any of these might have stopped the contract. Scottish firms in 1950 had very set ideas, and D.C.Thomson were not an their own

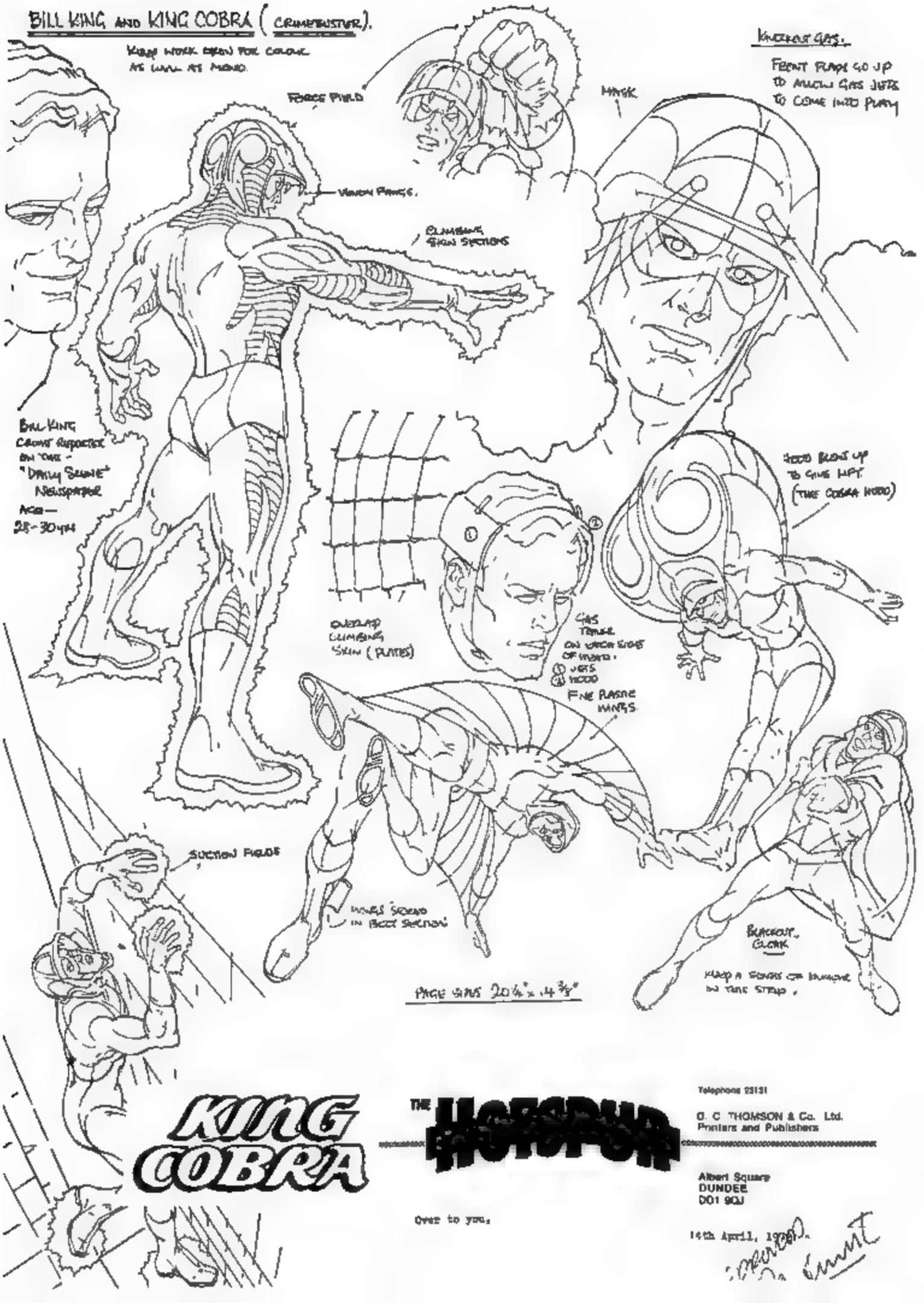
I can understand the things about the unions and agencies Dan Cavanagh, the father of Pat, who now runs Temple Art was the first agent ever allowed in That was around 6" 68 They only let him in because they were running short of artists

P What were the good things about D C Thomson?

R They printed the best children s papers for years and years They had the best training programme The best journalists in children s comics, when you trace it back, are always Thomson people The people you were working for were really first class The editorial staff were great. There were no deadlines. They worked on the stock cupboard That was when an editor was allowed to buy in 12 instalments before the first one went to the printer You were 3 months in advance It means also that an editor may spot a young illustrator, who he thinks may have potential buy in stuff and say he could use it in an annual this year Next year sometime Never Maybe he could lose that work in the stock cupboard He could then give that man money and in the next few weeks some of that artist s work would be accepted for the paper An editor can t do that now If Steve McManus editor of 2000AD takes on someone, and he does occasionally, he can give them a single page story or future short and give them some money to last for a couple of months But he couldn t put them into a 6 7 page instalment serial immediately because they would have to work to a deadline which is almost like yesterday The reason, I m told is that there was a tax concession where the Inland Revenue would not take money on work that was paid for but not printed Nowadays regardless of whether it is printed or not it s taxed It meant that I didn t know what a dead line was until I worked at IPC Obviously you worked every week or you starved but deadlines were a most unknown

P Was your work ever been censored or changed?

R I haven t the faintest idea At Thomsons I never was never even knew the titles Thomsons thought that if you write a story now and it s on the stock cupboard principle it s not coming out for months If you were going to call it The Big Fred or whatever you might find that some other comic has already got Flying Fred At Thomsons they had every comic going every week laid out in


BILL KING AND KING COBRA (CRIMEBUSTER).
KNOCKOUT GAS.
FRONT FLAPS GO UP TO ALLOW GAS JETS TO COME INTO PLAY
FORCE FIELD
HAWK
VISION PANELS.
CLIMBING SKIN SECTIONS
BILL KING
CRIME REPORTER ON THE "DAILY SCENE" NEWSPAPER
AGE— 28-30yrs
HOOD BLOWS UP TO GIVE HEAT (TIME COBRA HOOD)
OVERLAP CLIMBING SKIN (PLATES)
GAS TUBES ON EACH SIDE OF HEAD.
① VEINS
② HOOD
FINE PLASTIC WIRES.
SUCTION FIELDS
WIRES SEWED IN BOOT SECTION
BLACKOUT GLOVE
KEEP A EYE ON HAWK IN THIS STRIP.
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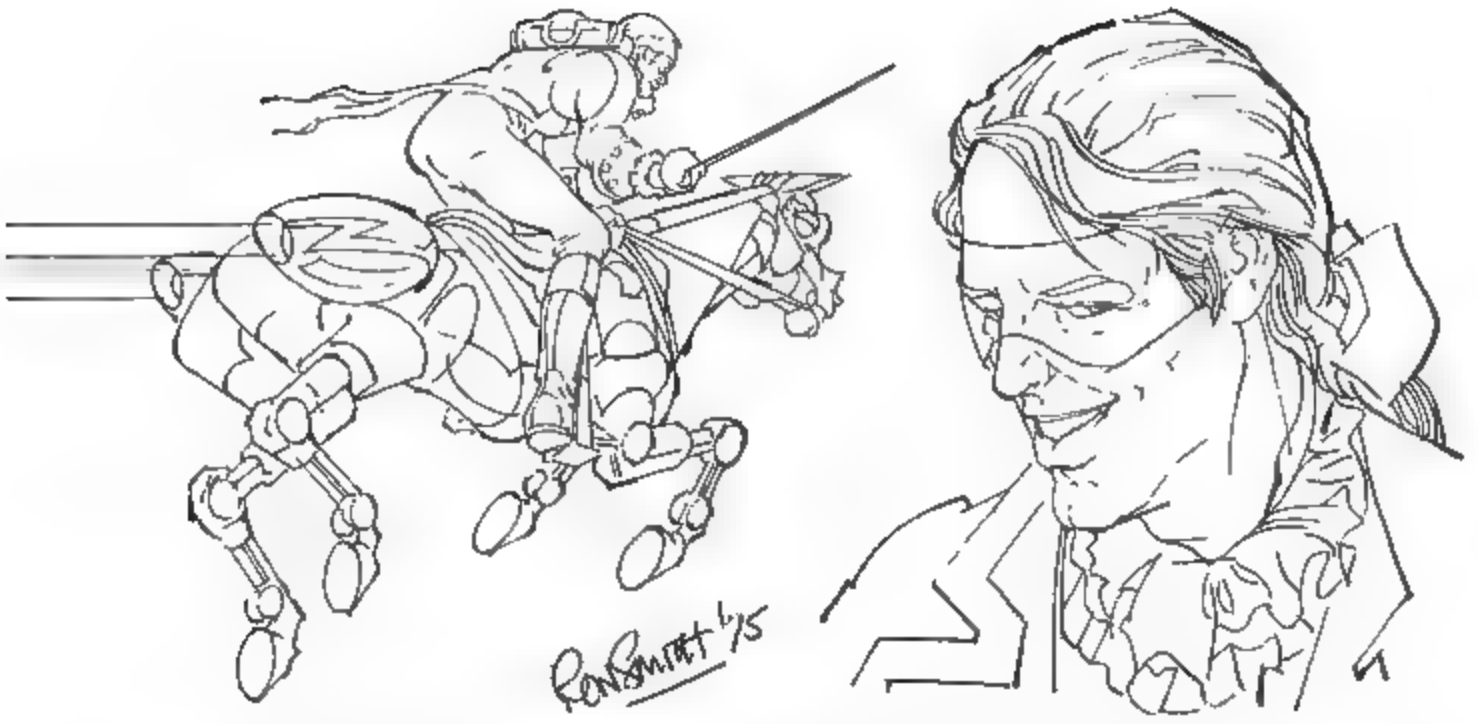
Over to you.
14th April, 1976.



Above:One of the character sheets for Nick Jolly.

a row in one of the offices as you know at a glance what was going on in all the titles. So before a strip goes into production they obviously look through the comics and pick an appropriate name.

J Do you approach a girls strip differently?

R The script determines the approach They are more difficult to draw You can have a hero and overdo the musclemann bit or do a leg a bit wrong because it really doesn't matter, but with ballet it had to be exact. D C Thomson were going to have a new character called Moira Kent, so they took me off Solo Solomon, their major western hero in Adventure, and I went to join this new paper, called Judy I went to a ballet school with a notepad and I just sat there There was b.o and great big legs all over the place I didn't make any sketches at all I came out and bought a book on ballet. That was tough because the script would call for an arabesque and you knew that all these little girls were going to ballet classes & they knew what was right.

P:The girls comics are all line work, and the boys adventure is black and white. Were you told to draw your girls comics in this line-work style

R No. You just picked up the magazine and realised everyone's got this clean, open style so obviously you just follow-on. For some reason girls don't like fast action. They like reasonably still characters. They tend to follow the story

It pays to do girls comics - that's half the market You can't just limit yourself to adventure stories.

J Do you find you have to draw things a lot more obvious for a younger audience?

R:I suppose. I draw the best I can, in the deadline I m given, for the price I'm being paid

I actually wrote my own stuff for Hotspur for a short spell It was a space story which I've forgotten the name of. I realised straight away that there's no way an illustrator can write his own stuff because the minute I started to write it I was writing for pictures & not for the story. It was about space cows and animals on a planet. It really didn t matter because it only ran for 17 weeks. I could see straight away that I couldn't write my own stuff

J Do you think that D.C Thomson have stopped advancing?

They were the leaders up until 1966/67, and then IPC started to take over

R:I think that Thomsons realised that the old childrens format was on the way, and that they should put their money in the teen market. I used to work on the girls magazine, Valentine, and they could see the market coming towards them. You've got to remember the '45 bulge too At the end of the war all the servicemen were coming back, and some hadn't seen their wives for 4 or 5 years. There was an enormous baby boom. They hit the comics market around '52, as toddlers, and we had them through until about '63/4. After that they had gone, and women had started to go onto the pill, so you would never again have that enormous bulge which carried all those comics that didn t have to change at all. In '64 you do see the change because you now have to compete in a different market. The children now have more money to spend, there are magazine pop programmes and they are looking at pop and fashion Thomsons just mixed what they had and let them die They didn't merge them and say this paper is called Hotspur, Wizard, Adventure & Rover. They just let them die. They'd keep the title going by having an Annual for a few years. Thomson began to invest outside of children s comics, and they just tooled down.

P What were the "purple years"?

R No one actually knows when it started, or how it started, but agents in Italy, Spain & Portugal got together and decided to break into our market. They must have realised that there was this big market that they got on the '45 bulge and we were really short of artists. They could come in because where you only had Schoolgirl's Friend at one time, there was suddenly a whole load of girls comics. Once one had come in the others came in as well, but it just suddenly happened one day. It was at a time when our living standards, our place in the pecking order, was going down. Everyone else was rising & you felt it was about time you should get a page rate increase. But their art was good and they were quite happy with the price, so you didn't really have an argument

At that time their cost of living was lower, so it was no different than trading with the States. You can't blame them, but at the same time they cut away your bargaining power, and you've no idea how long it's going to go on for. Then they started to appear, marry our girls and settle down. That was fine because then they had to pay our cost of living, so they began joining the queue

It was a question of time before I left Scotland & D C Thomson. I should have left 5/6 years earlier.

P But you left in 1970

R Yes. I had a daughter at a boarding school in Scotland and I couldn't very well leave until she was 18. Once she was 18 and came down south then I could settle up. You form a lot of friends over 23 years It's not that easy just to uproot and go off

J Did it matter where you lived when it's really just sending pages through the post?

R Not really, but it does pay to live close by, simply because you know what's going on. Also, I find, especially with IPC, that they want stuff the same day, so it's no good living in Spain or France There were one or two artists living in Switzerland who did stuff for Eagle and so on, but they gave it up after a while All these big names that appeared in Eagle had suddenly gone They couldn't keep that kind of standard under that pressure at that distance

J When you left Thomsons late 1970, did you try to get advertising in Fleet Street?

R:No. You can t find it regularly. You have to have a

similiar amount of money on the 30th of every month like everyone else to meet bills, so you have got to go into comics. There wasn t anything else that brings in the money regularly. I didn't want to go to IPC because it was like Thomsons, so I joined the AFA,which was the freelance agency which used to operate in Covent Garden. From there I got onto the American circuit doing 'Air Devils' for the newspaper comic pull-outs. That was a story of an airline flying Dakotas in the middle east. I got this huge mass of strips and I was straight into business About the same time Pikin Press found me. They had moved from Norfolk to Woking and they were thinking about doing Pop'. Ian (from Pikin Press) rang up the local paper and asked if they knew anyone who drew strips. Because the Features editor and I are friendly - we'd met in a bar somewhere around here - he told Ian about me. So I found I was in America, I had this Pikin Press thing, and I was still doing bits of freelance for Thomsons.

P Pikin Press did two comics for Nigeria Powerman and Pop.

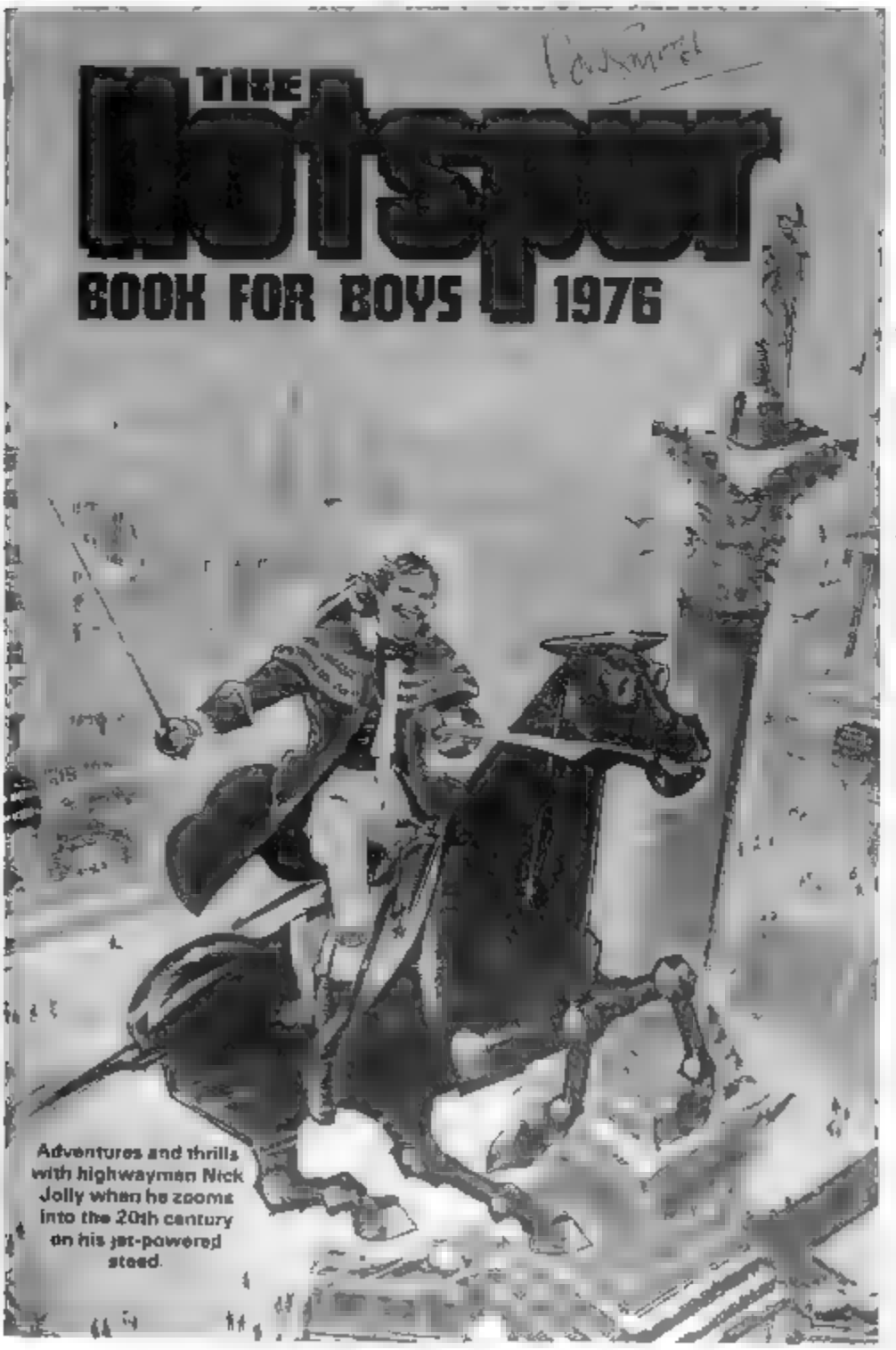
R I didn't do anything for Powerman. I did Sister Mercy for Pop, a cheap, 2-colour magazine She was a sister in a major Lagos hospitel.

P:You said before that you didn't like to do cross hatching, yet there's a lot of it in Sister Mercy

R Well, you have to on faces. They have to look Nigerian too, as opposed to looking like Kenyans

If you were doing well in Nigeria you could sell the idea to the next country. You could almost sell the same story but simply change the features of the people. It's well worth while too. It's just the distribution problems.

Pikin Press would print Pop in Newcastle and ship them out. At one stage there had been a dispute in Lagos harbour and 6 ships



Adventures and thrills with highwayman Nick Jolly when he zooms into the 20th century on his jet-powered steed.

Above Sister Mercy from the Nigerian comic, Pop. Left:A painted cover for a Hotspur Annual.

carrying concrete powder sank, so they then had to fly the copies in. They then decided to print them in Nigeria and there were problems there too.

Pikin closed in '73 due to the long term problem of distribution.

Any youngster coming along now should start drawing coloured men. Most of the African countries have been trained by the church schools so they are up to our 'O' level standard. They've also got money, a lot of money, and they re very keen on having characters of their own Black characters, with black names,& why not? Now they're all sitting there and all they get are American comics, occasionally, and Thomson and IPC stuff if it gets out there. There's that huge market

Not only that, but we noticed that some of the letters that came back through Pikin were from adults. They were reading it because it helped their basic English & they were interested in seeing what was going on

J:Don't they have their own artists?

R No, they don't. There was a Nigerian working on the staff, but he was a kind of technical advisor. You see, Nigeria was cut into two, North & South, because of differing religions What was happening in Lagos was not happening further up country.

Up until 1975 I worked for Oxford University Press doing the same sort of thing, Nigerian text books. They had a big market in doing illustrated dictionaries.

P Was that more an education thing?

R Yes, but it was in strip form

The big problem with all of this was that they kept changing governments. I did a big illustrated dictionary with tribal costumes

because the government of the day said,"We don t want Western stuff and characters We want the various tribes, but leave out the tribal markings because they have different ones in Ncarno and Lagot." and so forth. I did all this and there was a change of government. They said,"We want trousers, Pringle sweaters and Trilby hats. We don't want to look as though we've just stepped out of the bush." I said,"no way." It's the only time I'd actually had a written contract. Contracts with publishers are normally over the telephone. Oxford University Press had a written contract, with clauses, and it looks marvellous,but if something goes wrong like that you're bloody lucky to come away with £30

I've worked on books where I thought there was actually a book. I've done illustrations only to find out later that someone was going over to Germany to the book fair and was trying to put a book on the market with about the first 6 pages and maybe about 12 illustrations If it doesn't come off they usually turn round and say,"Well look. You were working with director X and I'm director Y, and I don't agree with what he said, and we don t really like your illustrations " And it always occurs after the book fair

Book illustration is a dicey area to be in

J How did you get involved with the Green Cross Code Man?

R Through the art agency, Temple Art. Agencies are great because they pay for themselves out of the advertising. With comics they do no more than you could do, but they get advertising which pays so much more it squares off their 10% I never think of their 20%

Green Cross Code Man was designed by a Ministry of Transport committee. It started off as a parrot who spoke to you on top of a belisha beacon. Then he became a man who spoke to the parrot. Then he became a man with a cross who spoke to the parrot who spoke to you. Then it comes to me and they want me to turn him into some sort of superhero. He originally had lots of bits, watches that did things, and we got rid of all that. Now he just sort of appears. He does nothing.

J He crosses the road.

R:Then they got the chap who plays Darth Vader.

P David Prowse

R to film the TV adverts. I looked at the film stills of him and made my drawings look like him. The last thing I did was to help design the robot they now have. They had a lot of alterations. Maggie Thatcher cut the allowance and it stopped but it'll come back. It'll come back because it worked

P You freelanced for Thomsons, doing Nick Jolly and King Kobra up until 1980.

R:Anything that lasted more than 17 weeks was exceptional. Even after I left King Kobra they had someone else back it out. Nick Jolly went on for some time. He was a highwayman who rode on his horse, Bess, in the 17th Century. He'd suddenly find himself in modern day London, with Bess turned into a mechanical horse I liked it. Lanky Hutton, Braddock V C. and Moira Kent went on for a long time too. There were exceptional & yet in the early days of D.C Thomson, in the 30s and 40s, they had characters of 4000 words and a single illustration that went on for 10 years or so

D.C Thomson worked on feedback. Moira Kent used to get a lot of mail from girls, and I d be told how many letters had come in

P Were you told whether they were good or bad?

R:They told me the bad ones. Six-Fingered man would happen quite often. That doesn t matter on 2000AD When I was doing Adventure in 1961 there was a sequence I did of the Crimean war, where I drew a horse team pulling a gun-carriage, and I put in the trace to the lead horse and all that stuff. I suddenly found out then that old age pensioners read these comics,because the print is big and they were fed up of world news Somebody wrote in who was in the cavalry in WWI and told me that all the trace leads to the lead horse were in the wrong position. So somebody actually follows these things through. The kids do. They count buttons. They read it through in about 30 minutes flat and they go back and they look at all the bits, the people in the windows, and compare notes with eachother. That's why you should put in a lot of detail & pay careful attention to it

P King Kobra was, unusually, a British costumed superhero

R A complete pinch. He's just Spiderman with fangs

P Were D C Thomson just doing a superhero because it looked like the next new thing that was coming along?

R Yes. They just said,"We want a superhero, but don't give us one where Marvel can take us to the cleaners." I just sat down and drew King Cobra. I made a mistake

P Which was?

R Instead of having venom in his fangs I gave him gas that came out through the sides of his helmet Of course, pretty soon it was obvious that any predicament he was in all he need do was to squirt the gas. Now the thing here was that an awful lot of kids write to me and say why doesn't Judge Dredd use his heat seeker bullets or his explosive shells? Why does he endanger himself when he's carrying these things? I don't know the answer to that one, so I write back and say they re on a very tight budget on 2000AD, like all police forces, and those shells cost ten times the others. So it's the duty of every Judge...

J & P:...to save money

P:You have adapted. You can draw anything. This is the difference from some of todays artists who want to stay in the science fiction/superhero field & they don't want to draw anything else. They do it from a fan mentality rather than from a professional mentality

R Could be, yes. There is an enormous market and wherever you go you'll find the same problem we are short of illustrators, or at least the ones that we want

An illustrator isn't just someone who's capable of drawing figures. In the first place you've got to be fit With the tighter and tighter deadlines if you're prone to coughs and colds and headaches you'd soon be in trouble For me flu is a major problem because I just don't have 10 days to have flu. A really runny nose is a major disaster because I've got cotton wool up each hooter and I think I can't bend over this board. Yet, it's got to be on the train tomorrow. So people have to be physically fit. They've also got to have the right kind of mentality. It's a one man business, so you've got to run your books. You've got to decide whether you're going to declare everything you've done or not...I always declare everything I've done,naturally.

It's like running a corner sweet shop. You've got to study the market, see where you're going next and be prepared to sit tight if you can't see the next move. You've got to be very adaptable. I certainly couldn't stick to one field. I've got to be able to draw for boys and girls and adults and advertising or whatever

I find, and I've always found, that there's never very many illustrators who hack the course. In fact, I ve had friends who've really come off their trolleys. When lobotomy was the rage in the early 60s, the poor devil actually went and had the operation. He had his two frontal lobes severed, and he was relaxed afterwards He was a totally different character. He carried a folder round with work prior to the operation, which was terrific stuff, and what he was then trying to flog. He couldn't see the difference and it was like the work of a professional and the work of a child. You find quite a few artists like that. The pressure is such, with the telephone ringing and people saying, "We've got to have it tomorrow "

Also, it s not economic to work in a studio outside of your own home because the hours are so different you'd never see your family. So you've got to have the studio within the home, and when your family seem you they expect you to give a help with the washing-up or the shopping or whatever. People come in and they don't see you as doing your job so they talk to you. They don't realise it's costing you about £10 an hour to talk to them

I think it's probably the job in toto which is the problem, and not many actually come through

P You started doing Judge Dredd in 1978

R I had some references for the very first Dredd I did, of his helmet, but every reference was different. I thought,"He s got half a dozen helmets." So I had with rather big eye pieces, and it was a bit like an American MP s helmet. Afterwards they sent me a 2000AD prior to mine...here we were in The Day the Law Died and suddenly Dredd steps out and he's gone back about 9 months in the comic.

P Traditionally, British comics have many panels to a page, and yet 2000AD only has 6 or 7 panels to a page

R 2000AD really followed what Warlord did years earlier, which was the 6/7 page instalment, using 2 or 3 artists working on the same character. The kids don't mind if the character varies a bit between the artists. There s no attempt made to match up one artist with another. Once you do that then you can vary your page layout, but if you're working on a 1-pager, as Thomsons always did, then you had to have 9 panels on a page whatever happened, otherwise you d never tell a story.

J:How do you approach your page layout"

R:I read through the script and obviously the 30 pictures are going to be fairly equally divided between 6 pages. You've got a rough plan then and you say,"That's a small picture, and that s a big one "

P What's the criteria for having a big panel"

R It usually says in the script,"This needs to be a big picture because you've got this and this and ."

P:You've got 10,000 people in it.

R:Yeah. I've given up doing many layouts like we all

did in 1982. We really got wild. They did a market research survey on 2000AD and the main thing that came out of it, according to Steve, was that the children couldn't sometimes follow the stories because of the layout. So he want a written instruction that we weren't to be quite as solid as D.C Thomson, but we were to go back to oblongs and squares and some free squares. So gone were the wavy layouts

P Have you ever received a script and thought it was rubbish, but drew it anyway because you were being paid for it?

R Yes. I've had scripts that were a bit too violent for my tastes, but there's not much you can do about it

J Do you tone things down?

R No, you can't tone things down, but wherever the settings of the characters are not detailed I'm always trying to put in humorous elements to balance things out.

P Wasn't the mix of humour and violence been what has made Judge Dredd good?

R.Yes. It's the secondary characters that I enjoy. The script says,'There's a man standing on the corner with a tray and he's selling boxes." Now, you can really go to town because Dredd is boring. No, I shouldn't say that

P:It's too late now, it's on tape

R:He's such a stylised character - he's got to be like that - you can't alter his poses. I drew him once where, because of the layout, he actually had to squat I had to redraw it because Steve said there's no way that Dredd would ever sit like that. He would look at the body standing over it with his hands on his hips. And Steve's right

Judge Dredd comes into the story with his set pose and set face, and so the interest really lies in all the things that are going on around him, The good thing about it is the format, because it's endless. The city, the city wall, the wasteland, the fact that they can go into space, that there's some sort of set-up in Britain with Judges and a Royal Family, and we don't really know what's going on elsewhere. If, in about 3 years time, they're running out of stories you'll find people coming in from Africa, and they'll have something So there are endless possibilities.

It's lovely because it's only just a century and a bit ahead of our time, so if I want to draw a TV set it's like my own I don't have to have an arrow saying, "This tube is really a projection TV set." If it's a car or truck it's dead easy. You just draw it as it is now and put on a jet pack, or make it anti-gravity. If you go another couple of hundred years further on you have got problems because you have to describe what everything is and what they do. So it's a wonderful format

P There's little attempt at continuity between artists I remember reading the Block War story, and Mike McMahon was drawing all the blocks with rounded tops, while you drew the buildings as square skyscrapers.

R Bolland used to draw skyscrapers with clean-cut tops too. It really doesn't seem to matter at all, which is strange

P:In America they'd be screaming at you, saying that's wrong, because there's no continuity. In Britain it's the story and character that seems to matter.

R And whether the thing moves. The Americans are stuck. I was chatting to them when they came over and they are still stuck in that format, with the continuity & the superhero figures. They'd never design Dredd as a hero. No way

I found that the Americans that turned up at the UKCAC 85 Convention didn't want to talk about Dredd, and they did not want to talk about 2000AD. They were very friendly but they wouldn't get into any kind of conversation. They came across simply to sell themselves, their comics and their ideas, not to absorb what was going on here

P:Do you see Judge Dredd as a hero or a villain?

R:I see him as a hero. He is a genuine person. He really believes in all this. He is the law

I've only drawn him once where he actually showed a human streak. I know he's a clone and all, but still. Dredd is in the Black Atlantic, full of all this gunge, when a Russian ship pulls him out and starts pumping out all this stuff. He's lying on this bed with tubes sticking out of him. The doctor is a woman, and as she's going round removing these things Dredd tweaks her backside. I was allowed, it said in the script, to give a tiny little quirk to one side of his mouth

I used to like it with the Landlady, Maria, and Walter always fussing around Dredd We knew then that Dredd liked semolina pudding and things like that. He had his flat, and he would be shown at night, still in full uniform, reading He had a sort of routine Now he doesn't. We know he's in the sleep machine, & after a few minutes he's refreshed, but he doesn't have a home life

J:You don't keep any of your own art or comics, so what do you do for reference if you have to draw a Mantz Tank or whatever?

R:What normally happens is that Steve will shove in a photostat with the script, because they know me.

First of all there's the editors conference. Then the script writer will write his script. Then they have a bit of a barny about how it should be. Then it comes to me. After me there's only the lettering artist, and that poor fellow goes absolutely screaming mad trying to get it all in before it goes to press More often than not I'll get a script on the first week of the month and it's going down 10-12 days away. You have to do 6/7 pages, and if it runs to more than one part they want a cover. I'm a 3 or 4 pages a week man, plus a Daily Star page. That's comfortable, and that's enough. I couldn't possibly do more than one installment every two weeks, and even that's stretching it a bit if I'm doing the Daily Stars as well. The double-page spread has to be sent a week beforehand to be coloured too.

J:You started the Judge Dredd newspaper strip in the Daily Star in 1981, but you didn't do the first one, did you?

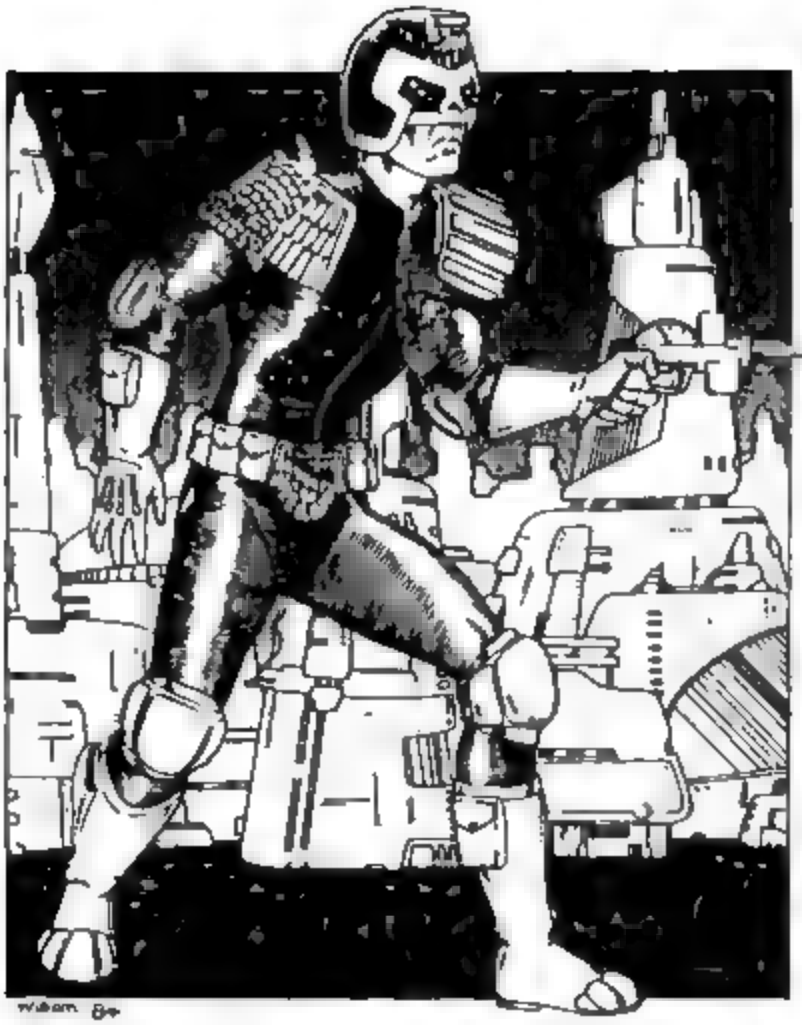
R The very first one was a mock-up. Robin Smith, the former art editor, cut up bits of an old 2000AD, & fitted it together so that the Daily Star could see what it would look like. Then he contacted me and said they'd had a look through all the 2000AD stuff and they'd picked me out, so I was doing it. They wanted to get it on the road straight away, so they printed the mock-up ((from a Mike McMahon drawn strip)) and I followed on

I get paid by IPC, and I get the same for the Star page as I do for a 2000AD page. I don't know who keeps the pages. All I know is that I don't see them

J You seem to cram a lot in

R:Some illustrators will read a script and decide to leave out lumps because it's too much That's okay I go along with that I shove it in because it's good business to shove it in. It may look overloaded to someone who's just looking at picture stories as an art form, but I'm not interested in that. I'm interested in the people who buy it and read it. It's got to have some kind of time value after you read it. You can go back and look at all the tiny bits and pieces

I feel it when IPC have a strike. On the last one I obviously couldn't do 2000AD, but I had the Daily Star to do. John Wagner was out, as were all the others, because they belonged to the Union. So I got scripts from the Daily Star. I'm not supposed to know who wrote them. They just appeared. I illustrated the strips and put my own lettering on, which I don't like After 3 weeks there was just the Star left, and next week I was doing the price guys on St. Ivel's yogurt.



it's that hairy, but there's no point in picking up anything that pays less or doesn't have the life of Dredd There isn't anything around. At the convention I saw that the Americans hadn't really changed, and there's no mileage in the American market

P What was your involvement in the revamped Eagle?

R:I tried for the Dan Dare strip, and when The Meknn didn't come up to scratch I lost it. So I just got in the first issue because they wanted to see how painting on the photos of the photo strips worked I got the job of painting characters from outer space, but I only did the one issue

J Why have you only drawn Judge Dredd in 2000AD when most artists draw one or two other strips?

R That's because that's the way I want it. All strips are the same and if I was doing Slaine or something else it would only be different the first couple of installments. It is really difficult being a strip artist because you're faced with these virgin boards every few days. Dredd's fine because once you've been doing it so long at least you know what you're doing

P:Judge Dredd has been reprinted in the Eagle Comics for America, but they are going to run out of material very soon. Are there any plans to do all-new stuff for that & perhaps reprint it in 2000AD?

R No. I was listening to Nick Landau at a conference, and he's going to mix it a bit more, using early stories and recent ones They jumped in high up the ladder in order to get the market to begin with

Nick is only going to buy stuff cheap, which he can get from IPC. He can't really afford to buy in fresh artwork just to suit his magazines

P I thought that IPC could commission more artwork

R:There aren't any illustrators There are lots of artists but Steve is very choosy Fair enough, he is a very good editor, and I'm not saying this because...

J he'll read it

R No. He's a real pro. He lives and breathes this magazine, and he has turned down American artists, who weren't any good, actually. Dredd looked like an American Football player. All the detail were on the boots and helmet. You didn t have wirey old Dredd standing there It just didn't look like him at all. Steve is short on illustrators

P:Can you tell us something about your plans to make this place into a school for illustrators?

R Plans in the past for insurance policies go out of the window because of inflation The first one I started was for £4000 when I retired and, in 1969, that looked quite a healthy prospect when everyone was living on £4 10 shillings a week. The only other way it to do it through property so you get something like this house and you buy in at the top, buying bits as people move, and slowly that property becomes yours. When I left Scotland I had a divorce, after 22 years, so I lost everything in Scotland I was one of the first people to go through the 1971 Divorce Act & they hadn't really worked out all the bits and pieces so the dear lady went off with the lot. I sold the house I had in '68 for £5500, having bought it originally for £1000. In '81 that same house changed hands for £95000

A school for illustrators in this country couldn t take more than 10 people If you were to train 100 people they would never get work The standard required is high enough now, & it s going to get even higher so you need some people who are trained for the job

J Does science fiction interest you?

R It doesn't matter what it is as long as it's picture story illustration. It depends on if it's got some kind of long life to it, and how much it pays Sport or cowboys or how-to-play-football - it doesn't really matter

I go to the newsagent and look at what's left on the rack at the end of every Friday to get a general view of what s happening in the UK. I'm not interested in the USA, and there isn't anywhere else right now, so I cannot see anything other than 2000AD & the Daily Star for the time being. That's not a bad thing for me because the longer I'm with Dredd the more secure I am. The kids are beginning to see me as the Judge Dredd artist whereas at one time it was Solland etc

J:Do you think there is an adult market?

R:Fantasy goes with depression. If you look at the 20s that's when the film industry in Hollywood took off. We're in a very depressed period, and we will be for a long time. There are more and more adults paying attention to comics than there's been for a long, long time simply because it's escapism, but it's still too early for people to put their money into it

J I read something recently saying that comics would be dead in 10 years

R There's no such thing, and I hate people who keep talking about the decline of comics It changes, as I've explained. There s the '45 bulge, the purple years, the Macmillan period, where things went up and down. There are changes in the market, in what people can afford. There's nothing to suggest that people have lost interest in them. Quite the reverse. The depression has bottomed out but it isn't going to rise for a long time Advertising is becoming more fantasy orientated It s into computers and cars, and I've just done an advert for Levi jeans where - in picture strip form - a chap is watching a rocket go off. This is over a photograph of a roaring crowd and the jeans. This is for France, Germany and Switzerland but not for here. It s just change, and the adult comic is 2 or 3 years off yet. You people are helping because you want to know more about the business Who writes it? Who draws it?

P Do you take an interest in British comics?

R I only take an interest in where I can get my own work printed. It's limited so I occasionally take a look at German and Italian comics I look at it but I realise there's no market for me there because I can't fit into their style

P:Do you read any just for pleasure?

R:Yes. I like Moebius' stuff, and I like his scriptwriting. The Italian comics I can't bear at all I know ours are violent but theirs are sadistic

P:Like Ranxerox?

R Yes. I don't see that as where the take-off will be. It will come out of things like Dredd, quite frankly. It's where you've got political comment, and you've got that in Dredd. It has things that are going on around us. When John Wagner writes that we've got a mob of unemployed youngsters coming around the corner I just draw punks and mods and rockers. It s the same in the real world with the robots having all the work It's along those lines that the adult market will take off ●

The Judge Dredd newspaper strip is now daily instead of weekly. This means that Ron is now working on that full time. Good luck with that, Ron, and thank you for your cover, help and hospitality.

Paul

The Riddle of

or Continuity? What Continuity?

The Spectre is dead: Long live The Spectre

Taking a leaf out of the illustrious past of Julius Schwartz, Steve Gerber is designing a Spectre for the 1980s, an alterego relationship relevant to modern times. Thirty years ago, this sort of thing just took wings and flew, and they ended up creating brand new Earths, separated by vibrators or something to account for it. Nowadays, that sort of thing just doesn't happen - We have Marv Wolfman's word on that - and so there will never have been a Spectre before

So passes Jim Corrigan the First, died 1940, deceased 1985. He leaves a life-story so bizarre, so convoluted, so badly-handled as to defy the notion of continuity altogether. It has been rumoured that Roy Thomas was planning a Graphic Novel to fix things up ,and if Roy couldn't do that, who could?) but if the Spectre is dead - as he has been all along, let us not forget - it hardly seems necessary

But it's a pity just to abandon things like that Happy memories for some of us are tied up in one part or another of the Spectre's past, and there's a lot of fun to be had picking over the bones of Jim Corrigan's life and death. Especially his death for, after all, wasn't that where it all began?

The February 1940 issue of "More Fun Comics" saw the debut of a new hero created by Jerry Seigel, a name which should be familiar, even to those who only casually glance at the splash pages of Superman titles There was to be no fiddling about with mere superheroes here, Seigel was going for incomparable, illimitable power, bounded only by the limits of the imagination. So comics didn't know then just what you could imagine, the idea was good

So Jim Corrigan had it all going for him, a successful police detective and engaged to a beautiful & loaded society heiress Then 'Gat' Benson took having him mob put behind bars the wrong way, and sent Jim off for a swim in a barrel of cement. He died His ghost was kept out of Heaven by a supernatural voice that sent it back to Earth, as its agent, to oppose evil (and not uniucidently get the late Jim's fiancee out of a hole). The Spectre adopted a costume - if you call a green hood/cloak and green trunks a costume, those white bits are his 'body' - and kept 'Jim Corrigan' as his cover, minus fiancee, who got rescued but jilted

The Spectre's series had potential but rarely used it There were flashes of genuine imagination but too many lame monster and magic stories and a lot of duff art from Bernard Bailey. In those early days, before comics discovered a sense of its own morality, the Spectre would kill, usually at a glance (Superman?Flash) but most often he handed the crooks over to the cops in the manner of a decent hero

The Spectre was also a charter member of the Justice Society of America, though the extra exposure didn't help none From all accounts, he seems to have been treated as just one of the boys when out of Seigel's sight (such as getting gassed in "All Star" 13 - all-powerful ghost, eh? - which led to Roy Thomas writing the Monitor out of 1985 into a retelling to get round that). His own series eventually had Jim Corrigan's body revived, which led to a distinctly different relationship there, but that didn't stop the gradual rot and, in 1946, The Spectre quit the JSA and surrendered his strip to Percival Popp, the Super Cop, drifting about intangibly behind the scenes a...ghost of his former self

Twenty years passed, superheroes came back into vogue, Earth 2 was (re)discovered and in 1966 Golden Age heroes and especially JSAers were all the rage, and in "Brave and Bold" 59 Gardner Fox and Murphy Anderson finally answered fan pleas with "The War that Shook the Universe."

In what was probably the first ever continuity-fixing story, Fox revealed just why an all-powerful, immortal ghost should have retired for 20 years. Simply, he was cancelled out by the arrival on Earth of the astral energies of an equal but opposite being, Asmodeus. Until Asmodeus' host-body died, both were imprisoned, neutralised. Classy. Once he'd got free, the Spectre wiped the floor with Asmodeus and, in the next issue, with his master, Shaitan. Glorious stuff

(Fox was also to be applauded for not trying to explain Percival Popp the Super Cop, indeed for totally ignoring him. Other, more literal minds, have not been so sensible, and given themselves headaches trying to write around him.)

Fox's approach combined his perennial pseudo-scientific themes with a somewhat dry mytho-religious feel. The Spectre was composed of psycho-matter, and could absorb 'good' energies, given off by the activities of such as peace workers,hospital doctors, priests & American soldiers in Vietnam(?!?)

Three 'B&B's didn't get the Spectre anywhere but Fox wrote him into the 1966 JLA-JSA team-up, where he temporarily held apart Earths 1 & 2, on a collision course in warp-space. Though ultimately not strong enough alone, the Spectre prevailed with the aid of Earth 1's Atom, who volunteered to shrink him and re-expand him. Since everything treated in this way (with the exception of Ray Palmer) exploded, it strikes one as a pretty callous offer, though it worked. Being all-powerful, the Spectre merely willed all the atoms of his body to re-assemble themselves from all across the Universe

Eventually, in late 1967, the Spectre got his own title. Fox and Anderson carried on for one issue,after which the Spectre fell into lesser hands (it is difficult to think of Neal Adams as a lesser hand, though it gets easier with every new issue from Continuity, but it must be said that he was rescuing no sinking ships here). Weird and wonderful were the Spectre's adventures, but most of all, they were not very good. This time it was not too little imagination but too much everyone was too aware of how powerful the Spectre was, and couldn't think of a decent way to make it difficult for him

In an attempt to combat the sales drop-off, DC tried to side-slip towards the still-successful Mystery market. Wunderkind Steve Skeates was brought in, so naturally it was done with relevance. As a punishment for getting too casual, like killing crooks when he had too much power to need to, the Spectre was set to read the Book of Judgement, lots of short stories that didn't really resemble old EC tales Once more a supporting character in his own series, the Spectre was not long from cancellation again.

So far the only riddle might be why everyone thinks the Spectre so marvellous a character when he clearly can't sell a story to save his...life. For your patience however we now introduce Denny O'Neill. From here it gets to be fun

O'Neill, in the late 60s/early 70s was DC's - perhaps comics - hottest writer. On the evidence of JLA 82/3 it's hard to see why. This was the out-and-out worst JLA-JSA team-up ever written and might well have been the worst ever JLA story, except that I've not read them all (this is not to be taken as an invitation to draw to my attention any issue likely to beat it.)

Aside from its other flaws, this story gave the impression that O'Neill hadn't actually read a Spectre story before (at least Dick Dillin got the costume right.) At the climax Dr Fate summons the Spectre from the crypt in which he is imprisoned (!) but the resulting gravities pull him apart; his body disperses and he dies

Oh yeah? O'Neill is clearly making this up as he goes along (did Julie Schwartz <u>really</u> edit this?) but quite apart from this nonsense about the Spectre dying, which he would have done if he was going to do it the first time, in 1966, there's the problem of this bloody crypt What, when, how and especially why don't come into it What also doesn't come into it is why O'Neill didn't tell Dillin about this crypt when giving him the script for the first part. Probably Dillin wouldn't have drawn the Spectre at the JSA meeting in that case

However the Spectre was now dead For 4 years that is

Adventure was short of a lead feature, having crashed out on no-hopers since Supergirl fled to her own title after 424. For 431, they brought back the Spectre

Yes, we're now up to the infamous Mike Fleisher version, that revival. Fleisher went back to the original version, the killing ghost. It is however fairly certain that Jerry Seigel never turned a crook to wood and fed him to a bunman, nor chopped up the hero's girlfriend into 7 seperate sections in a single panel. Nor did he write such repetitious stories or such unrelievedly one-note evil swine. Those 10 issues were a relentless and graphic welter of unpleasant death, a sick sadistic formularistic sequence where where only the grisly comeuppance was changed to punish the guilty There was even a revoltingly predictable story where the Voice permitted the Spectre to lay down his burden and become Jim Corrigan again, only for Corrigan to get mown down by another vengeful gangster and turn back into the Spectre. In this series, even God was a sadistic bastard

Nevertheless, Fleisher, with editor Joe Orlando did achieve something, the even more comprehensive confusion of the reader as to what was going on with the Spectre. Wasn't he dead, asked someone? Orlando didn't care. that s Denny's problem, my boy. He got the Spectre into that crypt and he can get him out, nothing to do with us. This one is the Earth One Spectre

Now there s a novelty: 2 Spectre's, no-one s tried that one before. Only, if we're now on good ol' Earth 1, howcum when Corrigan sarcastically calls a mild-mannered reporter Clark Kent, does some naive (idiotic) rookie cop ask if he's really Superman? It would explain the personality change - ignoring which Earth we might be on - from messianic angel to slathering demon, & also maybe the less obvious error, which is having this version be ghost through and through. Jim Corrigan was supposed to exist, along with the Spectre.

(And since Jim Corrigan has appeared for only one panel in all the years since - "All Star" 70 - it seems to be forgotten that he is actually alive and well. And presumably still living in Gateway City, if it survived the Crisis)

If that hasn't got you scratching your heads,please to remember that, whilst this little charmer of a series was actually running, the Spectre turned up in the 1974 JLA-JSA team-up, courtesy of Cary Bates and Elliott S! Maggin. Don't attempt to work out why but basically the JLA killed the JSA and the Spectre pleaded with God to revive them. And he did. No two ways around it, this had to be the Earth Two Spectre who was dead (real dead, I mean), so what is he doing" Not a lot actually,since he's intangible and invisible throughout.

So there were now 2 Spectre'S" Don t you believe it. All was quiet until 1980 and then, virtually simultaneously, both messiah and murderer turned up again, and clearly on Earth 1 as well. The messianic one met our Supermen in "DC Presents", to prevent him from entering Heaven, and also to do something about that overweening pride. The murderous one turned up in "Ghosts" so that Dr 13 could disbelieve in him as well. So much for 2 Spectres, but he's obviously a schizo now.

It's the final straight now. Alan Moore intervened in 1984 in "Swamp Thing Annual" 2, ordering the Underworld and appointing the Spectre the Guardian of the Approaches, charged with defending Heaven from chaos. It s a plum of an idea, utilising the potential and the power of the character for possibly the first time And it's not even entirely out of left field after that "DC Presents" ..

As for Roy Thomas, who ought to know better, he inserted the Spectre into the second part of the ill-conceived "America vs the Justice Society" mini-series First he made it explicit that the Spectre had moved to Earth 1 (without any shred of reason - there goes that 2 Spectres theory), then he clarifies that there's just ghost and no human after all, and lastly, in having the Spectre offer casually to destroy the entire world (I know it's only Earth 2 but,..) he entirely negates Alan Moore's work - in fact the work of Seigel, Fox and everyone but Fleisher. This is not a hero talking.

None of the above is relevant to the Spectre's final hours, to his challenge to the Anti-Monitor at the Dawn of Creation, to the destruction of Reality or its reformation, without him. In comics death never depends on life. Only the Spectre s powers were relevant, not his truly cocked-up history

Take the above object lesson to heart.

The Spectre is dead. Long Live the Spectre.●

Martin Crookall

Fanzines

Modern Eyes is £1 50 by post from Paul Johnson.

36 A4 pages.

This is a slick production job with two colour cover It is extremely weird, and even though Paul has written/drawn each strip they are all written and drawn in different styles. It takes a while to get used to it, but once it clicks it s effective, It has an edge to it

Killing Stroke 1 is 77p by post from Shane Oakley

36 A4 pages.

This is a stripzine with an interview with Alan Moore The strips, on the whole aren't brilliant, but Art Wetherall's Deathwatch and Shane s Dennis the Maniac stand out above the rest For the record, the other strips are by Chris Ski, Rob Sharp, Roy Sinclair and Mike Matthews, but they are not their best

Hardware 1-3 are 35p plus a stamp each from Andrew Yoxall

16 A5 pages in each

Yet another stripzine from 3K Magazines. Number 1 had a nice Phil Elliott strip in the back, which is the only strip of any worth in the thing. Number 2 was worse, but Number 3 is a great improvement. All the strips were good. (They were by Shane Oakly,Rob Sutton,Stephen Harrison, John Jackson and Chris Ski.) I hope the trend continues

Killer 1 is 50p plus stamp from Ste Pickford.

16 A4 pages

Strips by John Jarman and Lew Stringer entertain but the rest is not worth the effort of printing. They would be more suited to A5 I would say, and the extra pages would allow for more story

Maniac 7 is 40p plus stamp from Hugh Campbell

32 A5 pages

The main feature is a look at Grant Morrison s Captain Clyde, but the strips,articles and letters are also good

Martin Crookall.

A word to interior illustrations which are varied and excellent. Mike Matthews' Swamp Thing was silly & funny (did you know Bissette gave him his home address?) but I was particularly impressed with Dave McKean's stylish and atmospheric Hawkeye, inside the cover.

I was very intrigued by Bambos' latest Ratman which caused me to raise a few questions myself in answer to that last panel. Correct me if I'm wrong but there's an underlying theme to most Ratman stories, whereby they focus upon one aspect of the superhero, practice or convention, depicting it in that cartoon style that strips it down to the bare, faintly ludicrous bones, & poses a question about the genre, designed to set us thinking.

This time it's Crime and Punishment. Bambos breaks the rules by having a supervillain tried for his crimes and more by having Ratman there to witness the defence and consider the eventual fate of someone who's there because of him.

The question raised, explicitly in the final panels, is whether Spikey, alias the Crimson Crusher, is responsible for his crimes or whether his actions were beyond his effective control. It's the old question about whether Crime is voluntary or environmental. Spikey's Counsel (and does this have to be an American trial, even if we've a British judge?) makes a pitch for Spikey's actions being a result of childhood mistreatments. It's enough to make Ratman feel like...a rat (I couldn't help it, don't hit me!) ((Thwapp!!))

It's not enough for the reader though (not this reader anyway). Bambos makes the mistake of using one of comics unique aspects, the opportunity to simultaneously depict two contrasting stories: at the foot of his first page we get a succession of images that 'illuminate' the words of Defending Counsel, so that we get to see directly what he's really like, whilst Ratman only hears the words and, presumably, accepts them. This alone is enough to undermine the final question from Ratman's position.

I'd also question the parade of characters who give their individual thoughts to the reader on the first & last pages. All they do is blur the sequence, confuse the issue, obscure the question. A steadier, more single-minded tone would have emphasised the conclusions more strongly.

And that question? Should we punish or rehabilitate? Yes, we should rehabilitate, and I am one of those concerned at the state of affairs in our crowded prison system. But, and this is an increasingly important but, I cannot agree with the implication in that final panel, as to whether Ratman should have captured the Crimson Crusher at all.

I quote:"Whenever anything has been mucked up, whenever anything outrageous happens, there is a reason for it. You still have a mucked-up, outrageous situation on your hands, however, and explaining it does not alleviate it one bit. If someone does something really rotten, there is a reason for it. Learn it...and you learn why he is a son of a bitch. The fact is the thing that remains..."(Roger Zelazny,The Hand of Oberon) If you want to know what all that means, it means that a criminal is a criminal and a crime is a crime. You can learn all you wish or may about why he did what he did and if you're enormously lucky you can learn what can be done to remove that impulse. Whatever the circumstances that create a "common" psychopath, and this is what Bambos has used, I firmly believe in putting him away once you've got him. If someone is prone to inflicting injury upon his fellow citizens, your first duty is to protect them from him.

((Bambos replies:Thanks for taking the trouble to write and express your opinions Martin. The parade of characters I thought were important in that they highlighted the range of responses that such a case can bring out. Ratman's opinion was just one and no more important/correct than anyone elses. I think the Roger Zelazny opinion was held by Commissioner Boredom:"..no

matter what happened in the past Crusher must pay for the crimes of the present."

I thought that presenting a rational defense and prosecution denied the possibility of labelling Crusher a 'common' psychopath, both sides made valid points. They didn't lie or distort the truth. There was a certain amount of irony in the pictures accompanying the text but I was trying to entertain my readers as well as engage their minds.

I was left wondering whether you had certain expectations, ie - here's the story, here's the message, we all know who is right/good and who is wrong/bad, & the only failure was in the story not conforming to those expectations. Or on the other hand have I failed to comunicate due to inexperience, incompetence or inconsistancy, and being a bit of a dick-head?))

Turning the page we come to the meat of the issue, Ian Gobson and his interview. A pleasant and intelligent bloke is Mr. G. I think my favourite illustration of those printed are the two panels from Petra; it's not a scene with which you'd associate Ian Gibson's art, yet it's human and warm, and the faces are depicted with careful control. I like an artist who can display an expression.

Fiona Jerome's Frank Miller's Ronin:(So to speak) There had (and I repeat myself) been a dearth of critical response to this series. On one level I can understand why; I'm prolific and opinionated but I wouldn't know where to begin if I had to review Ronin, so I've every admiration for Fiona in coming up with

anything intelligle at all, let alone the careful examination contained herein.

Yes, there was an awful lot of hype surrounding the project, and particularly about it being Frank Miller's Ronin, which I tend to regard as being a good sign, & hoping that there's more of it. (With reservations: Bernie Wrightson's X or Mike Kaluta's Y is one thing but Bill Mantlo's Z is a horse of a different colour.)

Despite the case Fiona makes for praising Ronin for its levels of ambiguity I can't help feeling reserved about the series. Artistically it does rip-off several Japanese creators, and the change in style from the Daredevil days is too abrupt, particularly in the often rigid insistance on formalised panel progressions, at the expense of the story motion. Miller's main failing is that he still can't draw a particularly good human face, his art here is not fully controlled, and, that area in which he is an acknowledged star - movement - is too rigidly controlled.

As for the story, ambiguity only works fully if it's a product of a detailed and comprehended story. Moore and Lloyd are on top of their series, Dave Sim of his. Both permit and encourage ambiguity, in seperate ways, and know what they're doing because of their detailed understanding of where they're going. Miller doesn't do this; the story fractures inbetween issues 2 & 3 and the failure to control his material, to know his ending in advance, prevents Miller from exploiting fully the possibilities of ambiguity. Instead what Fiona describes is as much confusion as ambiguity.

I don't think Ronin ultimately worked, on an artistic, aesthetic, or commercial basis. It gets close, very close at times, but it never fully convinces. It was worth trying, but the question is going to be whether or not Miller pushed too far, too hard, too fast. I hope not, but I think he may have done.

Lastly, tell John that it was another excellent Albert on the back.

Frank Plowright.

Firstly, you're to be commended for transforming the zine into something that's consistantly entertaining and informative, and to produce something of that quality on a reasonably regular schedule must be very demanding indeed. I certainly hope that you do meet with success now that you've got American distribution.

The interview with Ian Gibson was especially welcome. Over the past two years I've come to admire his artwork more and more. Ian certainly didn't pull any punches did he? I'm pleased to see someone involved with IPC detailing the shortcomings of their system in print, something most professionals seem loathe to do (for fairly obvious reasons). Grain was very well rendered, and I look forward to seeing more in future issues.

More David McKean artwork please.

In Cutting Comments you say that Eclipse aiming their adverts at people who don't usually buy comics is a step in the right direction, but wouldn't it be far more useful if Eclipse aimed their comics at people who don't usually buy comics? Off the top of my head I can only think of Strange Days and Mr. Monster as being vastly different to the majority of mainstream titles. They do distribute more way out stuff (Beanworld and Kitn'n'Katz) but their own product is mainly more superheroes and reprints of old work by artists who'd probably rather forget the stuff.

Pete Scott.

Arkon Sword is, as I'm sure you already know, a well-produced zine with much to recommend it. You seem to have covered all the bases very competently. The only thing that's missing from your pages is an article by Alan Moore. It's now virtually mandatory for all first-division fanzines to contain a 3 or 4 page splurge by the Northampton Nabob. The absence of such a feature from Ark gives the whole zine a sort of devil-may-care, to-hell-with-the-consequences feel. Congrats on having the guts to fly in the face of convention.

Best thing about the issue is the exchange between yourself and Ian Gibson. ((Don't forget John Jackson.)) One of the best interviews with a comic artist I've ever seen outside the pages of The Comics Journal. I love this sort of thing - the outspoken comments, startling revelations, coded magickal secrets of the ages,etc. The preliminary sketches and figure drawings that accompany the text are quite fascinating and truly inspirational, awakening in me a latent desire to pick up my enchanted Notring (forged from a piece of meteorite metal) and DRAW for the sheer pleasure of it. Unfortunately my inveterate laziness soon put paid to this impulse. I especially like the Nale Jones figure studies - boffo!

Well-handled Ronin overview - I like Fiona Jerome's stuff better and better. I have to say, though, that I'm dismayed by the current trend towards 'analysing' comics. Ideally fanzines should be lauding utter trash (the BEST kind) in a thoughtful yet vivid way. 1950s horror/sci-fi, early 60s 'weirdo' stuff (Rat Fink, ugly stickers), legendary badfilms and ads from stupid old comics, cover repros, posters from el disgusto porn, monster and death-crapflics. YES, THE MOST BAFFLING MYSTERIES EVER TO HAUNT HUMAN EXPERIENCE.

Paul Harrison.

So what was it about Ark 5 that really caught my attention? To be honest, it was Pete Scott's piece on Angel & the Ape. Not the definitive article perhaps (so where can I get hold of those elusive issues of Neat Angel) but an article which neatly and affectionately extracted the essence of that all-too-brief comic strip. It was a beautifully illustrated strip, the slapstick was comparatively funny (the comparision to be made with just about any other comedy title between 1960 and 1980) and the satire was sharp and cruel, yet never so as to be unpleasant or vindictive. One minor inaccuracy - Angel O'Day reappeared once or twice after the series ended in the 60s. She helped save the world(!) in Showcase 100 and I'm fairly sure there was another appearence which I've so far failed to track down. Maybe only the most ardent of sentimentalists would admit to caring about such things.

One consistantly good feature of Ark is the quality of interview you manage to obtain. I'm amazed at how you've obtained such an excellent interview with Ian Gibson through the post, without the benefit of that special chemistry of repartee which comes with face-to-face conversations. To sustain such a high level of interesting discussion throughout such a very long interview, covering such a wide range of topics, must be some sort of record for an amateur interviewer. This one comes hot on the heels of the Dean Mullaney interview (in Fantasy Advertiser) as best of the year.

I rather anticipated that I would soon be quite unable to open a fanzine without finding appraisals, critiques and adoring dissections of Ronin. Instead, very much to my surprise, months and months have passed without any really effective article finding its way into print. On the contrary, Ronin only seems to be mentioned as an example of the vastly inflated prices which the Big Two are capable of inflicting upon their direct sales customers. Fiona's article has at least begun to redress the balance - the first really intriging attempt to make sense of the various conflicting directions underpinning Miller's story, plus a fine and genuine appreciation of the art and colouring. Like me, it seems that Fiona was impressed. I'm still not sure from her article whether she actually enjoyed the experience of studying Ronin or whether, like me, she found an intellectual stimulation which comes from true Art (Capital A) but missed out on that warm glow which accompanies the reading of the very best works (in the comics field, perhaps Love & Rockets is the leading example. Not only impressive but capable of appealing to all the baser instincts and therefore immensely enjoyable). Great stuff anyway, from Fiona.

One final point on the subject of really classy comics; I managed to obtain Cerebus 77 today. If anyone had told me that even Dave Sim could fill 3 pages with Cerebus doing nothing more nor less than taking a leak into his bedside chamber pot, I would have refused to believe it. But there it is in black & white (what else?) - not one word of dialogue - and for all followers of the saga it truly IS an intense and emotional episode. Now THAT is class, THAT is comics genius in action.

Chris Law,

I cannot allow the criticism of Stan Lee that appeared in "Cheap Shot's" article on Angel & the Ape. It seems that Stan bashing is quite popular these days but without doubt he is one of the all-time greats. In terms of influence within the media he stands as high as Eisner himself. Ok, so Stan has his faults, not least of which is his penchant for hype. You might also argue that all the Marvel creations were the work of others like Ditko and Kirby. However all the long-running series Marvel have were created by Lee, and Ditko and Kirby haven't created series anywhere near as successful on their own. Lee was the greatest editor - ever.((If you reread the article,Chris, you'll find that Pete said Lee has become tiresome since,& wasn't criticising the original work. Capt.A/4th World/Creeper/Hawk & Dove/Mr.A/ at least they've kept working on good stuff!

N·E·X·T I·S·S·U·E

STEVE BISSETTE
...talks about his comics career, going back to his first underground work for Abyss, and on to his plans for the future, but most of all he talks about Swamp Thing.

Steve has generously offered a cover, which I can't wait to see. (That's the great thing about being an editor - I get to see everything before anyone else.)

EDDIE CAMPBELL
Alec is Eddie's autobiographical strip, and it has appeared in many Small Press magazines over the past few years. Escape are publishing collections every year for the benefit of those who can't get all the issues. This warm, human strip is just one of many that Eddie has 'created' from his own life and experiences. He tells all: about his friend Brian Holland; his strips to America; and about selling artwork on Australian beaches.

ALAN DAVIS
This guy is prolific. In a few short years Alan has drawn, Captain Britain, Marvelman, D.R. and Quinch, Batman & the Outsiders, and others. Long time friend Les Chester talks to Alan about his life on the boards so far. Alan has supplied some rarely seen art to illustrate the interview, and has donated a page of artwork to be won in a special competition.

JENETTE KAHN
Her name is on every D.C.Comic, but what does she actually do? The President and Publisher of D.C.Comics talks about her job, tells us something of upcoming projects, and answers all your questions. Well, mine actually, but you know what I mean.

MARV WOLFMAN
Marv has written for both Marvel and D.C. over the past decade, writing series like Tomb of Dracula, Night Force, The New Teen Titans and Crisis. He is a good writer, and honest about his work. He also knows a lot about the comics industry. Were the ideas for Man-Thing and Secret Wars poached from DC by Marvel? Marv knows, and he tells all next issue.

Plus: Phil Elliott has drawn a strip written by Paul Duncan;
Halo Jones by Bernard Leak, illustrated with pencils by Ian Gibson;
Maus by Pete Campbell, a detailed look at Art Spiegleman's graphic novel;
Nexus by Fiona Jerome, the Baron/Rude SF hero comes under Fiona's studious eye;
Mad Max by Pete Scott, the road warrior is a victor of many a chase but can he outrun the tongue of Pete Scott?;
and art by Martin Chaplin, Dave Harwood, John Jackson, Pete Martin, Pete Scott, Chris Williams and others.

I should point out that some of these items may be pushed out if space prohibits.

It's £1.50 by post (£3 to America seamail) and I'm taking orders now. Please make everything payable to 'Paul Duncan' whatever you send money for. Thanks.

ALBERT THE MOUSE

HI GANG, MY GUEST TODAY IS THE ONE AND ONLY JOE DREDD!! SAY HELLO JOE.
DO NOT CALL ME JOE, CITIZEN.
DID YOU KNOW JOE THAT RON SMITH HAS DRAWN MORE PAGES OF YOUR STRIP THAN ANYBODY ELSE ?!!
QUANTITY DOES NOT IMPRESS ME CITIZEN.
NO ? WELL DID YOU KNOW THAT RON'S BEEN DRAWING STRIPS SINCE 1949 ?!!
AGE DOES NOT IMPRESS ME CITIZEN.
RON'S NOT JUST WORKED ON BOYS COMICS, LIKE, BEEZER, WARLORD AND 2000AD. HE'S EVEN DONE STUFF FOR BUNTY AND JUDY!! THE GIRLS COMICS!!
NO GIRL OR COMIC HAS EVER IMPRESSED ME CITIZEN.
BY Ron Smith ©1985.
OKAY THEN, DID YOU KNOW THAT RON CREATED THE GREEN CROSS CODE MAN !! EH? NOW YOU'VE HEARD OF THE GREEN CROSS CODE MAN AIN'T YA JOE ?!!
OF COURSE I HAVE. I ARRESTED HIM ONLY THE OTHER DAY..
ANY CITIZEN WHO GETS HIS KICKS FROM CROSSING THE ROAD IS A DANGEROUS MENACE TO TRAFFIC.
END